ARTHUR O. FRIEL

# THE PATHLESS TRAIL

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# THE PATHLESS TRAIL

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In the year 1925, the controversial Englishman, Colonel P. H. Fawcett disappeared into the remote mountain country of Brazil to a fate that baffled a curious world. Colonel Fawcett had excited archeologists and armchair adventurers with his quest for a lost prehistoric city which he believed to exist in this unexplored hinterland.

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(continued on next page)

titled non-fiction volume, THE RIVER OF SEVEN STARS.

But Friel was best known in those days for his fiction. A prolific and accomplished writer, he wrote his novels of high adventure about the fearsome jungle that he knew first hand, and which he flavored with his own fertile imagination.

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THE PATHLESS TRAIL is the first of a quartet of books that grow progressively more imaginative with each title. Historically, these novels appeared as long serials in the grand old pulp magazine of the 1920's, Adventure, prior to appearing in book form in both this country and in England. Other Adventure stalwarts of the period included Talbot Mundy, Harold Lamb, Hugh Pendexter, and Arthur D. Howden Smith; an array that influenced a youthful Robert E. Howard and enthralled many thousands of readers.

Featuring white Indians, w[illegible]ures, and dreams of empire, the series has lain half-forgotten, half-buried, its once great popularity in the shadow of almost fifty years. But to this day it remains an exciting and powerful series for the armchair adventurer.

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# THE PATHLESS TRAIL

## ARTHUR O. FRIEL

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## I. - SONS OF THE NORTH

Three men stood ankle deep in mud on the shore of a jungle river, silently watching a ribbon of smoke dissolve above the somber mass of trees to the northwest. The tallest, lean-bodied but broad-shouldered, black of hair and gray of eye, held himself rigid and gazed unmoved. His mates -- one stocky, red-faced and red-headed; the other slender, bronzed and blond -- betrayed their thoughts in their eyes. The red man squinted quizzically at the smoke as if it mattered little where he was. His companion watched with a certain wistfulness.

Behind them a number of individuals in nondescript garments smoked and stared with the interest always accorded strangers in out of the way places. Copper-faced men peered at the rifles hanging in the right hands of the strangers, their knee boots, khaki clothing and wide hats. The women let their eyes rove over the boxes and bundles reposing in the mud beside the three.

"Ingles?" asked a woman through the stem of her black pipe.

"Notre-American," asserted a man, nodding toward the broad hats. "Englishmen would wear the round helmets of pith."

"Mercadores? Traders?" suggested the woman, hopefully.

"Exploradores," the man corrected. "Explorers of the bush. Have you no eyes? Do you not see the guns and high boots?"

The woman subsided. The others continued to smoke.

The smoke ribbon vanished in the north. The three strangers turned their heads and looked southward, upriver.

The red-haired man spoke: "So we've lit at last, two thousand miles from nowhere, and now the boat's gone. What is it you call this place anyway?"

"Remate de Males. Which means 'Culmination of Evils.' You've got your feet in the Brazilian mud of the Javary River which flows into the Amazon. On the other side is Peru."

They turned and looked dubiously at the town -- a row of seventy-iron-walled, palm-roofed houses set on high palm-trunk poles, ladders dropping from each doorway to a muddy street.

"Before you see it again, Tim, you'll think it's quite a town. Above here is nothing but a few rubber estates, seven hundred miles of unknown river and empty jungle."

"Empty is it? Then they kidded us on the boat. They said it was crawling with snakes and tigers and lizards and vampires and spiders as big as your fist. If that's what you call empty, Cap, don't take me to a place where it's crowded."

A slight smile twitched the set lips of the tall "cap."

"They're here, Tim. Lots of other things too. Who's this?"

Through the idlers came a portly copper man in uniform.

"He's the same one who came on the boat in a police uniform," the light-haired member exclaimed. "He must be the police force and the whole army!"

Tim snickered and stepped forward. "What's on your mind, friend?" he asked.

"Boa dia, senhor," responded the official. With the words he affably slipped an arm around Tim's waist and lifted the other hand toward his shoulder. But that hand stopped short, then flew wildly out into the air.

Tim gave a grunt and a heave. The official went skidding and slithering six feet through the mud, clutching at nothing and contorting himself in a frantic effort to keep from sprawling in the muck. By a margin thin as an eyelash he succeeded in preserving his balance and stood where he stopped, amazed and angry.

"Tim!" barked the black-haired one in a military tone.

Automatically, Tim snapped erect. Almost at once he relaxed again. In the meantime the tall man had stepped forward and faced the raging representative of the government of Brazil.

"Pardon, comrade," he said with an engaging smile. "My friend is a stranger to Brazil and not acquainted with your manner of welcome. In our own country men never put the arm around one another except in combat. He has been a soldier. You are a soldier. So you can understand that a fighting man may be a little abrupt when he does not understand."

The smile, the apology, and the subtle flattery from one whose manner betokened him as an army officer, mollified the aggrieved official at once. The hot gleam died out of his eyes. He saluted punctiliously. The salute was as punctiliously returned.

"It is forgotten, Capitao. As the capitao says, we soldiers are sometimes overquick. I come to give you welcome to Remate de Males. My services are at your disposal."

"We thank you. Why do you call me capitao?"

"My eyes know a capitao when they see him."

"But this is not a military expedition, my friend. Nor are any of us soldiers now -- though we all have been."

"Once a capitao, always a capitao," the Brazilian insisted. Then he hinted: "If the capitao and his friends wish to call upon the superintende they will find him in the intendencia, the blue building beyond the hotel. It will soon be closed for the day."

The tall American's keen gray eyes roved down the street to the weather-beaten house whose peeling walls once might have been blue. He nodded shortly.

"Better go down there," he said. "Come on, Merry. Tim,

stick here and keep an eye out. And don't start anything."

"Right, Cap," replied Tim. "There won't be any trouble. Hey there, buddy, would you smoke a good cigarette?"

"Si," grinned the soldier-policeman, all animosity gone. As the other two tramped away through the mud they also grinned, looking back at the North and South American pacing side by side, blowing smoke and conversing like brothers.

## II. - AT SUNDOWN

Past loungers, past other doorways, past dogs and goats, the pair marched briskly to the house whence the federal superintendent ruled the town with tropic indolence. There they found a thin, fever-worn, gravely courteous gentleman awaiting them.

"Sit, senhores," he urged, with a languid wave of the hand toward chairs. "I am honored by your visit, as is all Remate de Males. In what way can I serve you?"

The blond replied: "We have come, sir, both for the pleasure of making your acquaintance and for a little information. First permit me to introduce my friend Roderick McKay, lately a captain in the United States army. I am Meredith Knowlton. The third member of our party is Timothy Ryan who stayed on the river bank to talk with -- er -- a soldier of Brazil."

The federal official nodded, a slight smile in his eyes.

"We are here ostensibly for exploration," Knowlton continued, "but actually to find a man. I think it quite probable that we shall have to do considerable exploring before finding him."

"It is a matter of police work?" asked the superintendent.

"No -- and yes. The man we seek is not wanted by the law, and yet he is. He has committed no crime, but the law wants him badly because the settlement of a certain big estate hinges upon the question of whether he is alive or dead. If alive, he is heir to more than a million. If not -- the money goes elsewhere."

"I might add," broke in McKay with a touch of stiffness, "that neither I nor either of my companions would profit in any way by this man's death. Quite the contrary."

"You are commissioned to find and produce this man?"

"Exactly," Knowlton nodded. "From our own standpoint he is worth much more alive than dead. On the other hand, any absolute proof of his death -- proof which would stand in a court of law -- is worth something also. Our task is to produce either the man himself or indisputable proof that he no longer lives.

"The man's name is David Dawson Rand. If alive, he now is thirty-three years old. Height five feet nine. Weight about one

hundred sixty. Hair dark, though not black. Eyes grayish green. Chief distinguishing marks are the green eyes, a broken nose, and a patch of snow-white hair the size of a thumb ball, two inches above the left ear. Accustomed to having his own way, not at all considerate of others. Yet not a bad fellow as men go -- merely a man spoiled by too much mothering in boyhood and by the fact that he never had to work. This is he."

From a breast pocket he drew a small grain-leather notebook, from which he extracted an unmounted photograph. The superintendent looked into the pictured face of a full-cheeked, wide-mouthed, square-jawed man with a half-cynical smile. After studying it a minute he nodded and handed it back.

"As you say, senhor, a man who never has had to work."

"Exactly. For five years this man has been regarded as dead. It was his habit to start off suddenly for any place where his whims drew him, notifying nobody of his departure. But a few days later he would always write or cable his relatives so that his whereabouts would be known. On his last trip he sent a message from a steamer saying he was bound for Rio Janeiro. That was the last ever heard from him."

"Rio is far from here," suggested the Brazilian.

"Just so. We look for Rand at the headwaters of the Amazon because Rio yields no clew and because of one other thing.

"It is known that he reached Rio safely, but there his trail ended. As he had several thousand dollars on his person, it was concluded that he was murdered for his money and his body disposed of. This belief has been held until quite recently when a new book of travel was published -- THE MOTHER OF WATERS, by Dwight Dexter, an explorer of considerable reputation."

The Brazilian's brows lifted. "I remember him well. He stopped here for a time, ill with fever. He has written a book?"

"Yes. It deals mainly with his travels and observations in Peru, along the Maranon, Huallaga, and Ucayali. But it includes a short piece on the Javary, and I have copied some of it here.

From the notebook he read: " 'It falls to the lot of the explorer at times to meet not only hitherto unclassified species of fauna and flora, but also strange specimens of the genus homo. Such a creature came suddenly upon my camp one day just before a serious and well-nigh fatal attack of fever compelled me to relinquish my intention to proceed farther up the Javary.

" 'While my Indian cook was preparing the afternoon meal, out from the jungle strode a bearded, shaggy-haired, painted white man, totally nude save for a narrow breechclout and a quiver containing several long hunting arrows. In one hand he

carried a strong bow of really excellent workmanship. This was his only weapon. He wore no ornament unless streaks of brilliant red paint be considered ornaments. And he was as wild and savage in appearance and manner as any cannibal Indian.

" 'To my rather startled greeting he made no response. Neither did he speak at any time during his unceremonious visit. Bolt upright, he stood beside my table until the Indian stolidly brought in my food. Then, without a by-your-leave, the wild man rapidly wolfed down the entire meal, feeding himself with one hand and holding his bow ready in the other. Though I questioned him and sought to draw him into conversation, he honored me with not so much as a grunt or a gesture. When the table was bare he stalked out again and vanished into the dim forest.

" 'After he had gone my Indian urged that we leave the place at once. The man, he said, was "The Raposa" -- a word which denotes a species of wild dog sometimes found on the upper Amazon. He knew nothing of this "Raposa" except that he apparently belonged to a wild tribe living far back in the forest, perhaps allied with the cannibal Mayorunas, who were very fierce; and that he appeared sometimes at Indian settlements, where, without ever speaking, he would help himself to the best food and then leave. My cook seemed to fear that now some great misfortune would come to us unless we shifted our base. When the fever came upon me soon afterward, the superstitious fellow was convinced that the illness was attributable directly to the visit.

" 'Aside from the nudity and barbarism of the mysterious stranger, certain personal peculiarities struck me. One was that his eyes were green. Another was a streak of snow-white hair above one ear. Furthermore, the red paint on his body outlined his skeleton. His ribs, spine, arm- and leg-bones all were portrayed on his tanned skin by those brilliant red streaks. In this connection my cook asserted that in the tribe to which "The Raposa" probably belonged it was the custom to preserve the bones of the dead and to paint them with this same red dye, after which the bones were hung up in the huts of the deceased instead of being given burial. Beyond this he knew nothing of the " Red Bone" people, except that to enter their country was death.' "

Knowlton returned the book to his pocket carefully.

"When that appeared," he continued, "efforts were made to get hold of Dexter with the idea of showing him the photograph. Unfortunately, by the time the book was published Dexter had gone to Africa, and was totally out of reach. Then we were called upon to follow up this clew and find the Raposa. Men with green eyes and patches of white hair above one ear are not common."

The official stared out through the doorway for a time, shaking his head slightly.

"Something of this Raposa and of those red-streaked people has come to my ears, senhores, but only as rumors," he said, slowly. "And one does not place great faith in rumors. Yet I have repeatedly been surprised to learn, after dismissing a story as an empty Indian tale, that the tale was true.

"Of the Mayorunas more is known. They are eaters of human flesh, inhabiting both sides of the Javary, deadly when angered, and very easily angered. Their country is not many days distant from here, but as they never attack us we do not attack them. It is an armed neutrality you might say. True, we have to be careful in drinking water, for they sometimes poison the streams against real or imaginary enemies, and the poisoned waters flow down to us, causing those who drink to die of a fever like typhoid.

"Of the Mayorunas, senhor -- you do not intend to go among them, seeking this wild man of the Red Bones? If you should do so it would be a matter of regret to me."

"Meaning that we should not come out again? That's a risk we have to face. We go wherever it is necessary."

"I am sorry. I regret also that I can give you no definite information. Yet I wish you all success, senhores, and a safe return. This much I can do and gladly will do: I can send word to another explorer who now is in the town and who knows much of the upper river. He may be able to assist you, and without doubt will be eager to do so. He is staying at the hotel, just below here -- Senhor Schwandorf."

The eyes of the two Americans met. The official coughed.

"Senhor McKay has been a soldier. And Senhor Knowlton -- "

"I was a lieutenant."

"Ah! But the war has passed, senhores. Senhor Schwandorf was not a soldier of Germany -- he has been in Brazil for more than six years."

"War's over. That's right," McKay agreed. "But don't bother to send word. We'll find him at the hotel. Going their ourselves. Glad to have met you, sir. Good luck!"

"And to you also luck, Capitao and Tenente," smiled the official. McKay and Knowlton strode out.

"Guess this is the hotel," hazarded McKay, glancing at a house which rose slightly above the others. "I'll go in and get us rooms. You get Tim and rustle our impedimenta up here."

He turned aside. Knowlton trudged through the glare of the sunset to the river bank where Tim and the army of Remate de Males still loafed up and down, the admired of all beholders.

"All right, Tim. We're moving to the hotel. No more war?"

"Lord love you, no," grinned Tim. "This feller and me are getting on fine. He's Joey -- I forget the rest of his names; he's got about a dozen more and they sound like stones rattling around inside a can. But Joey's all right. When I get off duty he's going to buy me a drink and maybe introduce me to a lady friend of his. Want to join the party?"

"Not unless the ladies are better looking than these," laughed Knowlton, moving his head toward the pipe-smoking females.

"But we'd better move along, Tim. It'll be dark in no time. Joao, can you get our baggage moved to the hotel?"

"Si, senhor. Immediatamente. Antonio -- Jorge -- Rosario! Carry the bundles of the gentlemen to the hotel, presto! Proceed, senhores. I, Joao d'Almeida Magalhaes Nabuco Pestana da Fonseca, will remain on guard until all your possessions have been transported. Proceed without fear."

## III. - THE VOICE OF THE WILDS

McKay, eyes twinkling again, awaited them at the top of the hotel's street ladder.

"Rooms any good, Rod?" hailed Knowlton.

"Best in the house, Merry."

"Nary a bug -- in the beds." The twinkle grew. "Didn't look in the bureaus or behind the mirrors. Come look 'em over."

Entering a sizable room evidently used for dining -- for its chief articles of furniture were two tables made from planed palmed trunks -- McKay waved a hand toward a row of doors.

"First three are ours," he explained. "Only vacancies here. Eight rooms in the hotel -- the other four over there. They're occupied by two sick men, one drunk -- hear him snore? -- and one she-goat which is kidding."

"Huh?" Tim snorted suspiciously. "I think you're kidding!"

"Not a bit. I looked. The last room on this side is the Dutchman's, and these are ours. Take your pick. They're all alike."

Knowlton stepped to the nearest and looked in. For a moment he said no word. Then he softly muttered: "Well I'll be spread-eagled!"

"Me, too," seconded Tim, who had been craning his neck.

The room was absolutely empty. No bed, no chair, no bureau, no rug -- nothing at all was in it except two iron hooks. Its floor consisted of split palm logs, round side up, between which opened inch-wide spaces. Its walls were rusty corrugated iron, guiltless of mirrows, which did not reach the roof.

"Observe the excellent ventilation," grinned McKay. "Wind blows up through the floor -- if there is any wind -- and then loops over the partition into the next fellow's room."

"Yeah. And anybody that drops his collar button is out of luck. It goes into the mud, seven foot down under the house. But say, Cap, how do we sleep? Hang ourselves up on those hooks?"

"Exactly."

"Kind of rough on a fellow's shirt, isn't it?"

"Yes, probably would be. But the secret is this -- you're supposed to hang your hammock on those hooks. You provide the hammock. The hotel provides the hooks."

"Did you say a Dutchman was here?" broke in Tim.

"German. Chap named Schwandorf."

"Yeah?" Tim's tone was sinister. "Let me have the room next to him, and if you hear any howling toward morning, don't get worried. It won't be me."

"None of that, Tim," warned Knowlton. "The war's over -- "

"Since when? There wasn't any peace treaty signed when we left the states."

"Technically, you're right. But this fellow may be useful to us. They say he knows the upper river."

"Well, if you can use him, I'll stay off. Where is he?"

"Out somewhere," answered McKay. "I haven't seen him yet. Want this first room, Merry?"

"Just to play safe, I'll take the one next the German. If I hear any war in the night, Tim, I'll be over with both hands going."

"That goes, Tim," warned McKay. "I'll take this room and you can have the one between us. Here comes the baggage train with our stuff. In here men!"

Puffing and grunting, Antonio and Jorge and Rosario and Meldo shuffled in with the boxes and bundles, which were stowed in the bare rooms. Then the four shuffled out again, grinning happily over a small roll of Brazilian paper reis which McKay had peeled from a much larger roll. Immediately following their departure, in came a youth carrying three new hammocks.

"Our beds," McKay explained. "I sent to a trader's store for them. He's the proprietor's son. Thank you, Thomaz. Tell your father to put these on our bill, and for yourself this small token."

More reis changed hands, and the young Brazilian with a flash of teeth informed that the evening meal would be ready soon. He disappeared through a rear door.

The three withdrew to their rooms and began wrestling with the new hammocks and the iron hooks. Swift darkness filled the rooms. The sun had slid down below the bulge of the fast-rolling

world. Thomaz re-entered, lit candles stuck in empty bottles, and placed one of these crude illuminants at the door of each of the strangers. By the flickering lights McKay and Knowlton disposed of their effects, bearing in mind Tim's observation that any article dropped on the floor would land in the mud under the house, where sounded the grunts of pigs. Their work was soon completed, and they sauntered together to the small piazza.

"Nice quiet little place," commented Knowlton. "Make a good sanitarium for nervous folks."

The comment was made in a tone which in the daytime would carry half a mile. McKay nodded to save a similar effort. The night concert of the jungle, now that the sun was gone, was in full swing.

Beasts of the village, the jungle, the river, all hurled their voices into the uproar. From the gloom around the houses rose a bellowing of cows and calves, howls and yelps of dogs, and grunts of hogs. In the black river flowing near sounded the loud snorts of dolphins and the hideous night call of the alligator. Out of the tangle of trees and great snakelike vines behind the town rolled the appalling roars of guaribas, raucous bird calls, dismal hoots, sudden scattered screams. And over all, whelming all other sound by the sheer might of its penetrating power, throbbed the rapid-fire hammering of millions of frogs.

"Frogs sound like a machine-gun barrage," said Knowlton.

"Or thousands of riveting hammers pounding steel."

"Queer how much worse it is when you're right in it. We've heard it all the way up two thousand miles of Amazon, but -- "

"But you're right beside the orchestra now. Position is everything in life."

The double-edged jest made Knowlton glance sidelong at his mate. He knew little of the tall, eagle-faced captain's past beyond what he had seen during the war, where he had met him and come to respect him. From occasional remarks he had learned that McKay had been in all sorts of places between Buenos Aires and Nome; and from a few intangible hints he suspected that his "position in life" had once been much higher than at present.

For a time they stood leaning against the wall, staring abstractedly out at the dark. The jungle din seemed to diminish, though perhaps this was because the ears of the men had become accustomed to it. At length through the discordant symphony boomed the voice of Tim.

"I know what people mean when they talk about a howling wilderness. Always thought it was a figure of speech. Think of all the things out there that are bellowing and waiting for us to

come in among 'em and get eaten up."

"You'll find the same things in cities," said Knowlton a bit cynically. "Different forms and different methods of attack, but equally merciless under the skin. Snakes in silk suits, alligators in dinner jackets, hunting cats and vampires painted and powdered, and all the rest."

"Yeah, you're right, Merry. But Tommy's shoving some food on the table. We better get it before the flies do."

They assailed a rubbery jerked beef, black beans, farinha, and a thick, black, unsweetened coffee. All three were wrestling with chunks of the meat when Tim, facing the door, stopped chewing long enough to mutter:

"Dutchland overalls. He's here."

The heads of the other two involuntarily moved a little. Then their necks stiffened and they continued eating. Tim alone stared straight at the burly, black-whiskered man who had halted in the outer doorway. And Tim alone saw the ugly look cross the newcomer's visage as he gazed at the khaki shirts, broad shoulders under them, and the unmistakably hostile face of Tim himself.

Catching the hard stare, the blackbeard advanced at once, eyes veering to the door of his own room. And to it he marched with heavy tread, opening the door with a kick, and shutting it with a slam. The three at the table glanced at one another.

"Say what you like," grumbled Tim, "but we're not going to get on with him. I don't like his looks. I don't like his manners. If you gents want to talk to this fellow I'm going slumming with Joey. Then I won't be around here to make any sour-caustic remarks and gum up your party."

"Might be a good idea," McKay conceded.

"There he is now," called Tim catching sight of the Brazilian. "Hey, Joey! Stick around a minute while I scoop a few more beans. Be with you right away."

He demolished the rest of his meal, and at the door smote the grinning army of Remate de Males a buffet on the shoulder, then vanished into the night.

## IV. - THE GERMAN

The door of the German's room opened. The black beard came out and marched to the table. Two paces away he halted and faced the Americans, ready to speak if spoken to, equally ready to sit and ignore them if not greeted. McKay and Knowlton rose.

"Herr von Schwandorf?" inquired Knowlton.

"Schwandorf. Neither Herr nor von. Plain Schwandorf." The

reply came in excellent if slightly throaty English.

"Knowlton is my name. Mr. McKay. The third member of our party, Mr. Ryan, has just left."

Schwandorf bowed stiffly from the waist. "It is a pleasure to meet you. Educated men are all too few here."

Seating himself at a place beyond that just vacated by Tim, he continued, "You stay here for a time?"

"Not long." They reseated themselves. "We go up the river as soon as we can arrange transportation."

The black brows lifted slightly. "It is a dangerous river. You would do well to travel elsewhere unless you have some pressing reason to explore this stream."

With an accustomed sweep of the hand he shooed the flies from the bean dish and helped himself to a big portion. Over the legumes he poured farinha in the Brazilian fashion.

"We have. We are seeking a tribe of people who paint their bones red."

Schwandorf's hand, conveying the first mouthful of beans upward, stopped in air. His black eyes fixed the Americans with an astounded stare. He lowered the beans, stabbed absently at a chunk of beef, sawed it apart, popped a piece of it into his mouth, and chewed for a time. Meat down, he spoke bluntly:

"Are there not ways enough to kill yourselves at home instead of traveling to this place to do it?"

McKay smiled. The directness of the man amused him.

"As bad as that?" asked Knowlton.

"As bad as that. Blow your head off if you like. Cut your throat. Take poison. Jump into the river among the alligators. Step on a snake. But keep away from the Red Bones."

"Why?" shot McKay.

"Cannibals -- and worse."

"Worse?"

"Truly. Most Brazilian savages do not torture."

"Pleasant prospect."

"Very. Nothing to be gained among them, either. If you're hunting gold, try the hills west of the Huallaga. None here."

Knowlton filled and lit a pipe. McKay slowly drank the last of his syrupy coffee and rolled a cigarette. Schwandorf continued shoveling food into his capacious mouth.

"Know anything about the Raposa?" Knowlton asked.

The German's eyelashes flickered. He ground another chunk of meat between his jaws before answering.

"Of course," he said then. "Wild dog. Sharp snout, gray hair, bushy tail. I've shot a couple of them."

"This one is a man. Green eyes, streak of white hair over the left ear. Paints himself like the Red Bones, as you call them, but he's not an Indian."

"Oh! That one? Heard of him, yes. Wild man of the jungle. Want to catch him and put him in a circus?"

"Maybe. We'd like to see him anyhow. Any way you know?"

"Might try a steel trap," black beard suggested callously. "But I don't know where you'd set it. Best way to get a wild dog is to shoot him, and he isn't much good dead. Or would this one be worth something -- dead?"

"Not a cent!" snapped McKay.

"And perhaps he'd be worth nothing alive," added Knowlton. "But we have a healthy curiosity to look him over. Guess the Red Bone country would be the likeliest place. Is it far from here?"

"Keep out of it," was the stubborn reply.

The Americans rose. "We are not going to keep out of it," Knowlton declared, coldly. "We are going straight into it. Thank you for your assistance."

"Not so fast," Schwandorf protested. "If you are determined I will help you if I can. Shall we sit on the piazza with a small bottle to aid digestion? So! Thomaz! Bring from my stock the kummel. Or would you prefer whisky, gentlemen?"

"Ginger-ale highballs for me," admitted Knowlton. "Can ginger-ale be bought here?"

"Indeed yes. At one milrei a bottle."

"Cheap enough. Thomaz, three bottles of ginger ale and one of North American whisky -- the best. Cigars also."

Schwandorf got up. "If you will pardon me, I will drink my kummel. Frankly, I do not like whisky."

"And frankly, we do not like kummel. All a matter of taste."

"Truly. So let each of us drink his own preference. I will join you in a moment."

The Americans sauntered to the door, while the German strode into his room.

"Blunt sort of cuss," Knowlton commented.

"Yes, blunt. But not candid. Knows more than he's telling."

Disposing themselves comfortably, they sat watching the lights of the town and jungle -- the first pouring from windows and open doors, the latter streaking across the darkness where the big fire beetles of the tropics winged their way. The night noise of forest and stream had diminished; but now from the village rose a new discord -- a babel of music emanating from the badly worn records of dozens of cheap phonographs.

"Good Lord!" groaned McKay. "Even here at the end of the

world one can't get away from those instruments."

A throaty chuckle from the doorway followed the words, and Schwandorf emerged carrying a big bottle. "Yet there is one thing to be thankful for, gentlemen," he said. "In all this town there is not one man who attempts to play a trombone."

The others laughed. Thomaz appeared with bottles and thick cups. Corks were drawn, liquids gurgled, matches flared, cigars glowed. Without warning Schwandorf shot a question:

"Have you seen Cabral -- the superintendent?"

"Yes."

"Ask him about the wild man?"

"Yes."

"Get any information?"

"Nothing definite. He suggested that we see you."

A pause, while Schwandorf's cigar end glowed like a flaming eye. "The Red Bones live well up the river," he began abruptly. "Twenty-four days by canoe, five days through the bush on the east shore. That would bring you to their main settlement -- if you were not wiped out before then. They're a big tribe, as tribes go. Ever been here before?"

"No. Not here," Knowlton told him. "I've been in Rio, and McKay here has knocked around in -- "

A stealthy kick from McKay halted him an instant. Then, deftly shifting the sentence, "in a number of places."

Another pause. "Then I should explain about tribes. Tribes here generally consist of from fifty to five hundred or more persons living in big houses called malocas. Unless the tribe is very big, one house holds them all. There may be any number of malocas, the inhabitants of which are all of the same racial stock; yet each maloca is, as far as government is concerned, a tribe to itself, controlled by a chief. No maloca owes any duty to any other maloca. There is no supreme ruler over all, nor even a federation among them. They live merely as neighbors -- distant neighbors. At times they fight like neighbors."

"When Greek meets Greek -- " quoted McKay.

"Just so. When I say, then, that the Red Bones are a big tribe, I mean that there are about five hundred -- maybe more -- individuals in their main settlement. They live in huts, not in one big tribe-house like the Mayorunas. They are not Mayorunas, in fact; they paint differently and are more cruel.

"The Mayorunas, by the way, are not so debased as you might think. Though cannibals, they do not kill for the sake of eating 'long pig,' like the cannibals of the South Seas. Neither do they eat the whole body. Only the hands and feet of their dead

enemies are devoured. These are carefully cooked and eaten as delicacies along with monkey meat, birds, and fish prepared for a feast in honor of a victory. The eating of human flesh seems to be symbolism rather than savagery. Furthermore, they do not range the jungle hunting for victims. They eat only those who come against them as enemies.

"So it is quite possible, you see, that strangers might go among them and escape death. It would depend largely on the ability of the strangers to convince the savages that they were friends. The difficulty is that the savages consider all strangers to be enemies until friendship is proved."

"A sizable difficulty," McKay remarked.

"Almost insurmountable. Yet it might be done. Mind, I speak now of the Mayorunas, not of the Red Bones. I tell you again that the Red Bone country is closed."

"And where is the Mayoruna region?"

"In the same general section. The Mayorunas are much more widely distributed. They are on both banks of the Javary and extend as far west as the Ycayali.

"Now if I sought to enter the Red Bone region -- and again I say I would not -- this would be my way of going at it. I would go first among the Mayorunas near the Red Bones and seek to convince them that I was their friend. I would make the Mayoruna chief as friendly to me as possible. I might even take a Mayoruna woman for a time -- some of them are handsome, and such a step would make me almost a Mayoruna in their eyes. Then I would persuade the chief to send messengers to the Red Bones with word of me and a request that I be allowed to visit their settlement. The request, coming from the Mayoruna chief, probably would be granted. I would then go in with a bodyguard of Mayorunas, do my business, and get out the Mayoruna route."

A thoughtful silence ensued. Bottles clinked against cups.

"Something in that idea," conceded Knowlton. "A good deal in it, barring the woman part."

"Yes," spoke McKay, his tone casual. "When you came out what would you do with your woman, mein Herr?"

Tongue loosened a bit by his kummel, Schwandorf chuckled.

"Ho-ho! The woman? Leave her, of course, when she had served my purpose. Why bother about a woman there?"

"I see." McKay's face, indistinct in the gloom, was unreadable, but his tone had a caustic edge.

Schwandorf laughed again. That rests with you. But now if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I have an engagement with a man at the other end of town."

"Certainly. We are indebted to you for your interest."

"It is nothing. Remember that I strongly advise you not to go. But if you will go, I shall gladly do whatever lies in my power to aid you in preparing for the trip. By the way," he added, "one of you has the room next to mine?"

"I have it," said Knowlton.

"Yes. Are you a good sleeper? I sometimes snore most atrociously, I am told. So perhaps -- "

"Don't worry. I can sleep in the middle of a bombardment."

"You are fortunate. Good evening, gentlemen."

When he was gone they sat for a time smoking, sipping now and then at their highballs. At length McKay said, "Humph!"

"Amen. Pretty square sort of chap, though, don't you think?"

"Not saying," was McKay's cautious answer. "Seems to be trying to discourage us and egg us on at the same time. Something up his sleeve, perhaps."

"Can't tell. But his line of talk rings true so far. Checks up with what we've heard about the Mayorunas and so on. And that scheme of working in through the Mayoruna country sounds about as sensible as anything. It might work. Say, why did you kick me when I was going to tell him you'd been in British Guiana?"

"Don't know exactly. Had a hunch. Seems to me I've seen that fellow before somewhere, but I can't place him. None of his business where I've been, anyhow. We're from the States hunting a wild man. That's all he needs to know."

But it was not enough for Schwandorf to know. At that moment he was on his way to the home of the Superintendent -- with whom he had no engagement whatever, to learn all he could of the business of these military-appearing strangers; also to impress on the official the fact that he had sought to dissuade them from starting on their mad quest.

And much later that night, when Knowlton was making good his boast that he was a sound sleeper, a black-bearded face rose silently above the iron partition between his room and that of the German. A hand gripping a small flashlight followed. A tiny ray searched the room, halting on the khaki shirt lying over a box. A tough withe with a barb at one end came over like a slender tentacle, hooked the shirt neatly, drew it stealthily to the top. Shirt, stick, lamp, hand, face all dissolved into darkness.

After a time they reappeared. The shirt came down, swung slowly back and forth, was dropped deftly where it had previously lain. The breast pocket holding the grain-leather notebook and the photograph of David Dawson Rand was buttoned as it had been, and the notebook bulged the cloth slightly as before. But the con-

tents of that book and the pictured face of Rand were now stamped on the brain of Schwandorf. A sneering, snarling smile curled the heavy mouth. And softly, so softly that none could hear it but himself, sounded the ironical benediction of Schwandorf:

"Sleep well, American officer! Dream on, poor fool! In time you will wake up. You will wake up!"

## V. - INTO THE BUSH

Sleepy eyed and frowzy haired, with shirt unbuttoned and breeches and boots unlaced, Tim emerged from his iron-walled cell into the cool-shadowed main room, blinked at McKay and Knowlton lounging over their morning coffee and cigarettes, stretched his hairy arms, and advanced sluggishly.

"Yow-oo-hum!" he yawned. All dressed and shaved like they were going to visit the C.O. And here's poor Timmy Ryan lookin' drunk and dirty and feeling worse. Morning to you, gents!"

"Same to you, Tim," McKay nodded.

"Who hit you?" asked Knowlton, squinting at the redhead.

"Nobody. Couple fellows tried to, but they were out of luck. Oh, I see what you mean! I did that while I was getting to bed."

"Waves must have been running high on the ocean last night. Drink some coffee. Thomaz, another cup -- big and black."

"Thanks, Merry. It was kind of an active night at that."

"I heard you come in," vouchsafed McKay. "Were you trying some high diving in your room?"

"I did some diving without trying, but it was ragged work -- I pulled a belly smacker every time. I got to tame that hammock of mine. It threw me four times running, and the only way I could hold it down was to unhook it and lay it on the floor."

"Sleep well then?"

"I did not. Cap, I thought I knew something about cooties, but I take it back -- I never knew anything about them till last night. Where they come from I don't know, but if they wasn't half an inch long I'll eat 'em. They darn near dragged me off whole, and all the sleep I got you can stick in a flea's eye. Look here."

"Ants!" said McKay after one glance at an arm dotted with swollen red spots. "Ants, not cooties. They're everywhere. Especially under the floor. That's one reason why folks sleep in hammocks down here."

"Ants, hey? Never thought of that. I'd sooner spend another night fighting all the jaguars in the jungle than those bugs."

He downed the thick coffee brought by Thomaz, took another cup, accepted a cigarette from Knowlton, and sighed heavily.

"Before I forget -- I asked Joey about the Dutchman, and..."

McKay shook his head, pointing toward the closed door of Schwandorf. Tim lifted his brows, winked understanding, and went on: "he says that this guy Schwandorf knows the river like a book. Says he's one fine guy and a man from hair to heels."

Following which he grimaced, adding in a barely audible whisper, "And that's the worst lie I ever told."

"We met Mr. Schwandorf last night after you went," Knowlton said, easily, drawing down one eyelid. "Very likable sort of chap. He's going to help us get started upriver."

"Uh-huh. When do we go? Today?"

"If possible."

"Glad of it. Yo-hum! Wonder how our neighbors are this morning -- the goat and the drunk and the two sick fellows. Kind of quiet over that side of the room."

Thomaz entered just then with more coffee. Knowlton turned to him. "Are the sick men better today, Thomaz?"

"Much, senhor," the lad said carelessly. "They are dead."

"Huh?" Tim grunted, explosively.

"Dead," the youth repeated. "They were taken out at dawn. Do not be alarmed. It was the swamp fever and not catching."

"Humph! Sort of a regular thing to die of fever here, hey?"

Thomaz shrugged as if hearing a foolish question.

"Si. Swamp fever, yellow fever, smallpox, beriberi -- today we live, tomorrow we are dead."

"True for you. There's always something hiding round the corner, waiting to jump you, no matter where you are. If it isn't one thing, it's another."

Despite his philosophical answer, however, Tim fell silent, his eyes going to the doors of the rooms where Death had stalked last night. Tim had no fear of a violent death, but he had a deep repugnance for those two assassins against which a victim could not fight back -- disease and poison. The Brazilian youth's nonchalant fatalism aroused him to the fact that here both those forms of death were very near; the one in the air; the other on the ground -- fever and snakes. For the moment he was depressed. Then curiosity awoke. "If this Javary fever isn't catching, how does a fellow get it?"

"Mosquitoes," McKay enlightened him. "The anopheles. It bites a man who has fever, then bites a well man and leaves the fever in him. Inside of ten days he's sick, unless he takes a huge dose of quinine right away. Mosquito attacks perpendicular to the skin. That is, it stands on its head. If you ever notice one of them biting that way get busy with the quinine."

"Huh! Fat chance a fellow's got of seeing how all these bugs bite him. And one mosquito standing on its head does that, hey?"

"So they say. Also they say it's only the female that bites."

"I believe that! I've been stung by females before now. How about the yellow fever? Get that the same way?"

"Same way, only a different mosquito -- the stegomyia. When you begin to vomit black you're gone. And if you get beriberi you're gone, too. First symptoms of that are numbness of the fingers and toes. Muscular paralysis until your heart stops."

"Nice cheerful place to die in, this Amazon jungle. Aw well, what's the odds?" Wherewith he inhaled more coffee and flipped his cigarette butt at a small lizard on the floor not far away.

The door of Schwandorf's room opened abruptly and the German stepped out.

"Morgen," he grunted, striding to the table. "Thomaz!"

The blackbeard grumbled: "Always feel grumpy until I eat. None of this coffee-cigarette breakfast for me. A real meal, coffee with gin in it, a cigar -- then I'm human. Sleep well?"

His bold gaze never flickered as it encountered Knowlton's.

"Fine. If you snored I didn't know it. Didn't hear the bodies taken out this morning, either."

"Bodies! Oh! Those fellows dead? Glad of it. Best for them and everybody else. Hate to have sick people in the place."

The Americans said nothing. They lit new cigarettes and waited for the other to become "human." And when his substantial breakfast was down and his big cigar aglow, he did.

"Well, gentlemen, have you decided to take good advice and let your Raposa alone?" he asked, affably.

"Who ever follows good advice?" Knowlton countered.

"Niemand -- nobody," Schwandorf chuckled. "So you will go." He shook his head solemnly. "I have said all I can without offense. But if you persist I can only help you to start. If possible I should like to go with you up river, but I must go to Iquitos, in Peru, on the monthly launch in a day or two. If now I can aid in the matter of a crew -- "

"That is what we were about to ask of you."

"So. Then let us be about it. I have been thinking, since you showed your determination last night, and have made inquiries. There are now in Nazareth, the little Peruvian town across the river, several men from whom you can pick an excellent crew. Men of the river and the bush. Men who are not afraid of hell or high water, as the saying is. Not remarkable for either beauty or brains, but good men for your work. I would suggest a large canoe and six or eight of those men as crew."

"Can't be too fussy here," Knowlton spoke as the others smoked thoughtfully. "Let's see the men."

All rose. But then Schwandorf suggested: "No need of your going to Nazareth. Better stay here unless you want to go through a great deal of ceremonious foolishness over there. It's Peruvian ground and the officials may insist on showing their importance by demanding your papers and all that. I can go across, get the men, and be back before you'd be through the preliminaries."

"All right, if it's not too much trouble."

"A good deal less trouble than if you went, to be frank. I'm known, and I can go straight about the business."

He tramped out to the piazza, descended the ladder and swung away down the street. The Americans, watching him from the doorway, observed that children in his path hastened to get out of it, and that he spoke to nobody.

"Prussian," rasped McKay.

"M-hm! Done time in the Kaiser's army, too, even if he has been here since before the war. But he's treating us pretty decently."

The captain made no answer. Their eyes followed the big figure until they saw it go sliding away toward Peru in a canoe propelled by two languid townsmen. Then McKay dropped a hand on Tim's shoulder, and the red-lashed eyes flew open instantly.

Briefly, quietly, Knowlton told of what had passed, then asked what information he had gleaned from Joao.

"He says," answered Tim, "this guy is a queer duck. Been around here quite a while, but Joey doesn't know what's his game. He goes off on trips upriver, stays quite a while, comes back unexpected, and nobody knows where he's been or why. He doesn't use local boatmen, and the Peru boys themselves don't know where he goes, or say they don't, anyways.

"Two of them came over here awhile back and got drunk, and Joey tried to pump them. Fritz goes away upstream to a little camp and then goes off into the bush alone while his Peru men hang around camp until he gets back. Joey's suspicious of him and advises me to stay away from him, too, though he can't name a thing against him."

"Queer," said Knowlton, looking again at the canoe.

"Gun running?" suggested McKay.

"Nope," Tim contradicted. "I thought of that, but Joey says there isn't anything to it. They watched him close and he doesn't ever get guns. Besides there's no one up there to run guns to but Indians, and these Indians are so wild they don't want guns. Whatever his game is, he plays a lone hand."

"May be perfectly all right, too," mused Knowlton. "A little gold cache or something -- though he said there was none in this region. Oh, well, what do we care. We have our hands full."

An hour drifted past, and at length a long boat put out from the farther shore and came surging across the sun-gleaned river.

"Handle themselves well," McKay approved, noting the easy grace of the crew. In the bow a tall, slender fellow stood with arms folded, balancing himself to the sway of the rather clumsy craft and watching the water ahead. In the stern, on a little platform whence he could look over the heads of the others and catch any signal from the lookout, a squat, dark-faced steersman lounged against his crude rudder. Between these two the paddlers stood, each with one foot on the bottom of the long dugout and the other on the gunwale, swinging in a nonchalant unison as their blades moved fore and aft. Under the curving roof of a rough cabin, open at the sides to allow free play of air, Schwandorf lolled like some old-time barbarian king.

The three Americans trudged to the landing place, and there the employees and the employers looked one another over. Eight men had come with Schwandorf, and a hard gang they were. The bowman, hawk-nosed, slant-eyed, black-mustached, with hairy chest showing under his unbuttoned shirt, had the face and bearing of a buccaneer chief; and the effect was intensified by a flaring red handkerchief around his head and the haft of a knife protruding from his waistband. The rowers behind him, though of varying degrees of height, all had the same sinewy build, the same bold stare, the same devil-may-care insolence of manner; and though none but the lookout wore the piratical red around his brow, more than one knife hilt showed at their waists. The flat-faced steersman gazed stolidly at the three with the unwinking, expressionless eyes of a snake. Back into the eyes of McKay and Knowlton came Schwandorf's words, "Men not afraid of hell or high water." They looked it.

"Here they are," announced the German, stepping ashore. "Jose, the puntero" -- he indicated the lookout -- "Francisco, the popero" -- pointing to the steersman -- "and six bogas. Good men."

McKay ran a cold eye along the line of faces. Under that chill scrutiny the third man's stare wavered and dropped. That of the next also veered aside. The rest fronted him eye to eye.

"Two of them will not do," he asserted, in the brusque tone of a captain. "Three and four -- fall out!"

Literal obedience would have put these men into the river, wherefore they stood fast. But, though they did not quite under-

stand the meaning of the words, they grasped the fact that they were not wanted. One laughed impudently, the other slid a poisonous glance at the bleak-faced officer. The squat Francisco scowled. So did Schwandorf.

"No man who cannot look me in the eye is needed," McKay declared. "Also, six men are enough. If necessary we will bear a hand at the paddles ourselves. Jose, you have been told by Senhor Schwandorf what we want?"

"Si."

"You can start at once?"

"Si."

"What pay?"

"We leave that to you."

"Um! A dollar a day for each man?"

"Money or goods?"

"American gold."

"Si. Bueno."

"Very well. Take those two men back to Nazareth, get what belongings you need, return here, and report to me at the hotel. I am captain. Understand?"

"Si -- Capitan."

As the boat drew out the two rejected men bade the three an ironical adios, and one spat in the stream. In the faces of the others, however, showed something like respect for the crisp-spoken captain, and Jose snarled something at the rejects.

"You might need those men," mumbled Schwandorf.

"Guess not," McKay answered, serenely, turning toward the hotel. "Come on, boys. Let's get our stuff ready to ride."

Less than two hours later their rooms were vacant, their duffle was stowed in the long dugout, the Peruvian crew stood arrogantly eyeing the inhabitants who had gathered to witness the departure, and the Americans were bidding goodby to Remate de Males in general and its German resident in particular.

"Mr. Schwandorf, we thank you for your efficient aid," said Knowlton, extending a hearty hand. "You have helped us to get going with all dispatch, and we hope we can repay the favor."

"You owe me no thanks," was the curt reply. "I would expect as much if our positions were reversed. I wish you luck."

"Get aboard, Tim!" McKay ordered, setting the example himself. Tim moved, first giving the important Joao d'Almeida Magalhaes Nabuco Pestana da Fonseca a real American handgrip and getting in return a double embrace from that worthy official. Whereafter he frowned slightly at Schwandorf and lit the last cigar he was to smoke for many a long day. With one final wave

of his cigar to the gesticulating Joao he turned his back on the town and faced the little-known river and inscrutable jungle. But neither his eyes nor his thoughts traveled beyond the bow of the boat. Through narrowed lids he studied the swaying paddlers and the piratical Jose. And his mind echoed the whispered warning of Joao, delivered during the effusive embrace at parting.

"Comrade, watch those bastardos boatmen."

## VI. - IN THE NIGHT WATCH

Day by day the long canoe crawled into the vast unknown. Day by day the downflowing jungle river pushed steadily, sullenly against its prow, as if striving to repel the invasion of its secret places. Day by day it slid past in resentful impotence, conquered by the swinging blades of the boatmen. And day by day the close companionship of canoe and camp seemed to weld the voyagers into one compact unit.

Through hours of blazing sun, when the mercury of the thermometer hung inside the shady cabin fluctuated well above 100 degrees, the hardy crew forged on. Through drenching rains they hung doggedly to their work, suspending it only when the water fell in such drowning quantities that they were forced to tie up hastily and seek cover in order to breath. When sunset neared they picked with unerring eye a spot fit for camping, attacked the bush with whirling machetes, cleared a space, threw up pole frameworks, swiftly thatched them with great palm leaves, and thus created from the jungle two crude but efficient huts -- one for themselves and one for their patrones. When night had shut down and all hands squatted around the fire in a nightly smoke talk they regaled their employers with wild tales of adventures in bush and town, some of which were not at all polite, but all of which were mightily interesting. And despite all discomforts, fatigue, and the minor incidents and accidents which often lead fellow travelers in the wilderness to bickering and bitterness, no friction developed between men of north and south.

Not that the boatmen were at all obsequious or servile. They were a reckless, lawless, Godless gang, perpetually bearing themselves with the careless insolence which had characterized them at first, blasphemous of speech toward one another -- but never toward the Americans. Disputes arose among them with volcanic suddenness, and more than once knives were half drawn, only to be slipped back under the tongue-lashing of the hawk-nosed puntero, Jose, who damned the disputants completely and promised to cut out the bowels of any man daring to lift his blade

clear of its sheath. Five minutes afterward the fire eaters would be on as good terms as ever, shrugging and grinning at their passengers -- particularly at Tim, who shook his head.

Yet Tim, for all his disparagement of these abortive spats, knew full well that any one of them held the makings of a deadly duel and that Jose's lurid threats were no mere hyperbole. He saw also that the rough-and-ready courtesy of this crowd toward their passengers was due largely to the attitude of Captain McKay, who had enforced their respect at the start by his soldierly bearing and retained it ever since by his military management.

For the captain, experienced in directing men, held himself at all times as a commanding officer should: he saw all, said little, treated Jose as a subordinate officer, and left the handling of the crew entirely to him. His aloofness forestalled any of that familiarity which, with such a gang, would have led to contempt. On the other hand, his avoidance of any assumption of meddlesome authority prevented the irritation and dislike which free men inevitably feel for the self-important type of leader. Thus he cannily steered himself and his mates between the two rocks which might have wrecked the expedition before it was well started. And Knowlton and Ryan saw and understood.

So the days and nights rolled by, the miles of never-ending jungle shore fell away behind, and, save for the occasional outbreaks of the crew, all was serene. To all appearances the boatmen were whole-heartedly interested in serving their employers faithfully, and the Americans were gliding onward with no thought of insecurity. Yet appearances frequently are deceptive.

In the heat of the day, Tim and Knowlton habitually fell asleep inside the toldo, not to awake until two hours before sunset, when, according to routine, the night's camping place would be sought and two or three of the crew would go into the bush to seek fresh meat. McKay did not sleep during the day's traverse. Nothing escaped his eye from the time when he emerged from his mosquito net in the misty morning until he entered it again by firelight. The men; the floating alligators and wading birds; the flashing parrots, jacamars, toucans, and trogons; the yard-long lizards and nervous spider monkeys of the tangled tree branches alongshore -- all these he watched quietly. And the sinister Francisco, watching him in turn, and the paddlers throwing occasional glances his way, came to regard him as the only alert member of the trio. Wherein they erred.

The truth was that every one of the three adventurers was on his guard. Tim had not forgotten the words of his friend Joao, and at the first opportunity he had quietly passed on the warning.

Moreover, the three had meditated on the unexpected assistance of Schwandorf, the speed with which the crew had been obtained, and the promptness of Jose to accept the first payment offered. Wherefore it had come about that at no hour of the twenty-four was every eye and ear closed. And the real reason why Tim and Knowlton slept by day was that they thus made up the sleep lost at night. Not that either of them patrolled the camp in sentry go. So far as the Peruvians knew, they slept soundly. But, lying in their hammocks, they divided the night watches. Tim's duty lasted until one in the morning. When a barely audible "All right" reached his ears after a silent jab at Knowlton, he was relieved.

A fortnight passed. So far as the crew was concerned, nothing happened. A little rough banter as they smoked their last cigarettes, then sleep and snores; that was all until morning. Men less experienced would have abandoned their watches long before. But these three were schooled in patience. And at times the light of the waxing moon revealed strange things which they never would have seen by day.

Once they camped close to a conical hillock of compact earth some four feet high and almost stone hard, from which radiated narrow covered galleries -- the citadel and viaducts of a community of termites. Tim, who harbored recollections of his ant battle at Remate de Males, had trained himself to sleep in a hammock where he was comparatively safe. He looked askance at the hillock, and was only partly reassured when told that termites were eaters of wood rather than of flesh. After sleep had embraced the camp he was still uneasy, lifting his net and squinting at the moonlit mound as if expecting a horde of pincer-jawed insects to erupt from it. And during one of these inspections he saw something totally unexpected.

From the black shadows of the forest had emerged another shadow, so grotesque and misshapen that it seemed a figment of indigéstion and weird dreams -- a thing from whose shaggy body protruded what appeared to be only a long tubular snout where a head should be, and which looked to be overbalanced at the other end by a great mass of hair. It stood stone still, and for the moment Tim could not decide which end of it was head and which was tail. Then slowly, the apparition moved.

Into that hard-packed earth it dug huge hooked claws, and from its tapering muzzle a wormlike tongue licked about, gathering the outrushing white ants into its gullet. For minutes Tim lay blinking at it, wondering if he really saw it.

Then, picking up his rifle, he slipped outside his net and advanced on the creature.

The animal turned, sat back on its great tail, lifted its terrible claws, and waited. Six feet away, just out of its reach, Tim stopped and stared anew. Then he grinned.

"You win," he informed the beast. "What you are I don't know, but anything that'll ramble right into camp and offer to give me a fight is too good to shoot. Help yourself to all the ants in the world. I'm going back to bed."

Still grinning, he backed away warily until sure the big invader would not spring at him. Knowing nothing of ant bears, he did not know it was hardly a springing animal.

On another night, Knowlton detected a creeping, slithering sound which made him slip off the safety catch of his heavy pistol and peer at the hut of the crew. No man was moving there. Still the sound persisted. Lifting his net, he spied, beyond the hut of the boatmen a moving mass on the ground -- a cylindrical bulk two feet thick that glided past like a solid stream of dark water. Its beginning and end were hidden in the bush, and not until it tapered into nothing and was gone did he realize fully that he had been gazing at an enormous anaconda.

Perhaps an hour later the startled forest resounded with an agonizing scream, so piercing and so appallingly human that all the camp sprang awake. The outcry came but once, sounding from some place not far off, near the water's edge and in the direction the huge serpent had disappeared. Before he had time to tell the others what he had seen, one of the men discovered the rut left in the soft ground by the reptile. Thereafter Knowlton kept his own counsel, listening to the excited curses of the men and their nervous scanning of the shadows. Jose said the screech was the death shriek of some animal caught and crushed in the tremendous coils. McKay nodded assent. When Knowlton casually said it was tough that nobody had been awake to shoot the thing as it passed, Jose emphatically disagreed.

A bullet fired into that fiendish giant would have meant death to one or more men he averred; for the serpent's writhing coils and lashing tail would have knocked down the sleeping-hut and shattered the spines of any men they struck. No, let Senor Knowlton thank the saints that the awful master of the swamps had gone its way unmolested. For the rest of the night Knowlton kept his watch openly, accompanied by Jose and three of the paddlers, who refused to sleep again until many miles away.

Two nights afterward the camp was aroused again. Out of the gloom and straight past the huts a thick-bodied, curve-snouted animal came charging madly for the river, carrying on its back a ferocious cat creature, fangs buried deeply in the neck -- a tapir

attacked by a jaguar. With a resounding plunge the quarry struck the water and was gone. The tiger cat, forced to relinquish its hold or drown, swam hurriedly back to the bank where it roared and spat and squalled in baffled fury. And though every man was awakened, not one left the flimsy shelter of his net. Nor did anyone speak until Tim announced his intention to go out and silence the cat -- a proposal which was instantly vetoed.

"Let him alone," snapped McKay. "You wouldn't have a chance in that black bush. A jaguar is bad all the time, and when he's mad he's deadly. Never fool with one of those beasts, Tim. I've met them before and I know what they can do."

To which Jose agreed with many picturesque oaths, declaring that a jaguar was no mere beast -- it was a devil. The jaguar, hearing voices, stopped its noise and probably reconnoitered the camp. But no man saw the brute.

Other things, too, passed within range of the watchers: a queer bony creature that was an armadillo; a monstrous hairy spider which slid like a streak up his net; a couple of vampires which flitted in from nowhere like ghoulish ghosts on wide and silent wings, seeking an exposed foot.

To Knowlton's watch came a strange owl-faced little monkey with great staring eyes and face ringed with pale fur -- one of those night apes seldom seen by man; a small troop of kinkajous, slender, long-tailed animals which looked to be monkeys, but were not; a big scaly iguana, its back ridged with saw teeth and its pendulous throat pouch dangling grotesquely; and more than one deadly snake and huge alligator.

To the ears of both sentinels came the mournful sounds of living things unseen. From the depths beyond drifted the weird plaint of the sloth. Goat suckers repeated by the hour their monotonous refrains, while tree frogs and crickets clacked and drummed and hoo-hooed. And on one bright breathless night there sounded over and over a call freighted with wretchedness and despair -- the wail of that lonely owl known to the bushmen as "the mother of the moon," whose dreadful cry portends evil.

Sometimes the air shook with the thunderous concussion of some great falling tree which, long since bled to death by parasitical plant growths, now toppled crashing back into the dank soil whence it had come. Other noises, infrequent and unexplainable, also drifted at intervals from mysterious darkness.

And in all the medley of night sounds not one was cheerful.

Then came the fifteenth day. It dawned red, the sun fighting an ensanguined battle with morning mists. Before that sun should rise again some of those faces were to be stained a deeper red.

## VII. - COLD STEEL

Some two hours after the start, while Knowlton and Tim enjoyed the coolness of the early day at the fore end of the cabin, another boat hove in sight ahead -- a long craft of eight paddlers.

As it came into view its bowman tossed his paddle in greeting. The boatmen ignored the salutation. The bowman, after shading his eyes and peering at the flamboyant figure of Jose, resumed paddling without further ceremony. But then McKay arose, waved a hand, and told Jose to steer for the newcomers. Jose with a sour look gave the signal and the course changed.

The other canoe slowed and waited. Its men watched the tall figure of McKay. Tim and Knowlton scanned the bronzed faces and liked them at once. The paddlers were Brazilians, but of a different type from the sluggish men of Remate de Males -- alert, active-looking, steady of eye, muscular of arm. All three of the Americans noticed that no word was exchanged between crews.

"Boa dia, amigos!" spoke McKay. "Who are you and whence do you come?"

"We are rubber workers of Coronel Nunes, senhor," the bowman answered, civilly. "We go to make a new camp. This land is a part of the seringel of the coronel, and we left his headquarters yesterday."

"Ah! Then the headquarters is above here?"

"One more day's journey," the man nodded.

"I thank you. Good fortune go with you."

"And with you senhor. May God protect you." With the words the speaker glanced along the line of boatmen and his eyes narrowed. As his paddle dipped and his men nodded their leave-taking, Francisco, the popero, sneered raucously:

"Hah! Mere slaves!" And he spat at the other boat.

Fire shot into the eyes of the bowman and his comrades. Their muscles tensed. "Better be slaves -- better be dogs -- than cutthroats!" one retorted. "Go your way, and stay on the other side of the river."

"We go where we will," snarled Francisco. To which he added obscene epithets directed against the men of Coronel Nunes in particular.

The unprovoked insults angered the Americans as well, and Knowlton leaped through the toldo toward Francisco.

"Shut your dirty mouth!" he blazed.

The steersman replied with the vilest name known to man.

An instant later, his lips split, he sprawled dazedly on his platform, perilously close to the edge. Knowlton, the knuckles of

his left fist bleeding stood over him in fury. Francisco's hand fumbled for a knife. Knowlton promptly stamped with a heavy boot heel.

"Back up!" rumbled Tim, fingering his gun at a pair of paddlers who came scrambling through the cabin. After one searching stare into Tim's hard eyes, the bogas backed up. A moment later they were thrown bodily into their own part of the boat by Jose, who blistered them with the profanity of three languages. Then McKay came through and took charge.

"That's enough, Tim. You too, Merry. Jose, I'll handle this. You, Francisco! Get up!"

The curt commands struck like blows. Every man obeyed. And when the squat steersman again stood up McKay went after him roughshod. In the coloquial Spanish of Mexico and Argentina, he flayed the offender alive. Jose himself, efficient man handler though he was, stared in awe. And Francisco, though not given to cringing, skulked like a beaten dog when he was finished.

Turning then to the men of Coronel Nunes, McKay formally apologized for the insults to them.

"It is nothing, senhor," coolly answered the bowman. "Again I say -- may God protect you! Adeos!"

The boat crawled upstream in silence.

When the next camp was made all apparently had forgotten the affair. The men badgered one another as usual, though none mentioned Francisco's split mouth; and Francisco, himself, although sulky, betrayed no sign of enmity. One more night of listening seemed all that lay ahead of the secret sentinels.

Sleep enveloped the huts. Snores and gurgles rose and fell. Tim, for the sake of effect, snored heartily at intervals, though his eyes never closed. He knew that any man walking from the crew's quarters must cast a very visible shadow across his mosquito net, and to him the shadow would be as good a warning as a clear view of substance. But hours passed and no shadow came.

At length, however, a small sound reached his ear -- a sound different from the regular noises of the bush -- a stealthy, creeping noise like that of a big snake. It came from the ground a few feet away, and it seemed to be gradually advancing toward his own hammock. Whatever it was, its method of progress was not human, but reptilian. Puzzled, suspicious, yet doubtful, Tim lifted the rear side of his net on which no moonlight fell. Head out, he watched for the crawling thing to come close.

It came, and for an instant he was in doubt as to its character, for around it lay the deep shadow of some treetops which at that point blocked off the moon. It inched along on its stomach,

its black head seeming round and minus a face, its body broad but flat -- a thing that looked to be a man but not a man. Then, pausing, it raised its head and peered toward Knowlton's hammock. Tim's doubts vanished. The lifting of the head showed the face -- the face of Francisco, the face of murder. In its teeth was clamped a bare knife.

Tim was outside his net in a bound, colliding with Knowlton, who awoke instantly. In another instant he was beside the assassin, who, with a lightning grab for his knife, had started to spring up. Tim wasted no time in grappling or clinching. He kicked.

His heavy boot thudded into the man's chest. Francisco was hurled over sidewise on his back. Another kick crashed against his head above the ear. He went limp, as Tim grated: "Lousy snake. Crawling on your belly to knife a sleeping man, hey?"

"What's up?" barked McKay from his hammock.

"Night attack, Cap. If you're coming out, bring your gun. Some of these others might have the same idea."

True enough, the boatmen were jumping from their hut. With a glance at the prostrate Francisco to make sure he was unconscious, Tim whirled to meet them, fist on gun. "Halt!" he roared. "First man passing this corner gets shot. Back up!"

The impact of his voice, the menace of his ready gun hand, the sight of Knowlton and McKay leaping out with pistols drawn, stopped the rush. But swift hands dropped, and when they rose again the moonlight glinted on cold steel.

"Capitan, what happens here?" demanded Jose ominously.

"Knife work," McKay replied curtly. "Francisco attempted to murder Senor Knowlton. If you and the rest have similar intentions, now's your time to try. If not put away your knives."

"Knives! Por Dios, what do you mean?"

"Look behind you."

Jose looked. At once he snarled curses and commands. Slowly the knives slipped out of sight. The paddlers edged backward to their own shack, leaving their puntero alone.

"The capitan has it wrong," asserted Jose. "We awake to find our popero being kicked in the head. We want to know why. If Francisco had done what you say I will deal with him. That I may be sure, allow me to look."

"Very well, look."

Jose advanced, stooped, studied the ground, the position of Francisco's body, the knife still clutched in the nerveless hand. Tim growlingly vouchsafed a brief explanation of the incident. Jose straightened, mouth a hard line, and his eyes hot coals.

"Si. It is true. Tomorrow we shall have a new popero."

With which he stooped again, grasped the prone man by the hair, dragged him into the moonlit space between the huts, and flung him down. "Juan, bring water!" he ordered.

One of the paddlers, looking queerly at him, did so. Jose deluged the senseless man. Francisco, reviving, sat up and scowled about him. His eyes rested on the three Americans standing grimly ready; veered to his mates bunched in sinister silence before their own hut; shifted again to meet the baleful glare of Jose. His hand stole to his empty sheath.

"Your knife, Francisco mio?" queried Jose in a menacing purr. "I have it. It seems that you are in haste to use it. Too much haste. But if you will stand instead of crawling as before, you may have your knife again -- and use it, too."

Francisco, staring sullenly up, seemed to read in the words more than was evident to the Americans. He lurched to his feet, staggered, caught his balance, braced himself, stood waiting.

"You know who commands here," Jose went on. "You disobey. You seek to stab in the night -- "

"Now or later -- what is the difference?"

"-- and now the boat is too small for both of us." Jose ignored the interruption. "Here is your knife. Now use it!"

He flipped the weapon at the other who caught it deftly. Jose dropped his right hand to his waist. An instant later naked steel licked out at Francisco's throat. The steersman's knife flashed up, caught the reaching blade, knocked it with a scraping clink. For a few seconds the two weapons seemed welded together, their owners each striving to bear down the other's wrists. Then they parted as the combatants sprang back.

Jose sidestepped twice to his right. Francisco, turning to preserve his guard, now had the light full in his face. But the moon rode so high that the steersman's disadvantage was negligible, and the next assault of the puntero was blocked as before. And this time the wrist of the popero proved a bit the better; he threw the attacking steel aside and struck in a slashing sweep at his antagonist's stomach.

A convulsive inward movement of the bowman's middle, coupled with a swift back step, made the slash miss by a hair's breadth. With the quickness of light Jose was in again. His knife hand, still outstretched sidewise, stopped with a light smack of flesh on flesh. Then it jerked outward. His steel was now red.

One more rapid step back, a keen glance at his opponent, and Jose stood at ease. From Francisco burst a bubbling groan. He staggered. His knife dropped. His knees gave way and the silvery moonlight disclosed a dark flood from his severed jugular.

With utmost coolness, Jose ran two fingers down his wet blade, snapped the fingers in air, and spoke to his crew: "As I said, we shall have a new popero. Tomorrow, Julio, you will take the platform."

A rumble ran among the men. Their eyes lifted from Francisco to the Americans, and in them shone a wolfish gleam. The bowman turned sharply and faced them.

"Who growls?" he rasped. "You, Julio?"

"Si, I do," Julio answered, harshly, fingering his knife. "I will be steersman, but I steer downstream, not up. Francisco spoke the truth. Now or later -- what is the difference? Let it be now!"

A louder growl from the others followed his words. One stepped back into the shadow of the hut.

"Perros amarillos! Yellow dogs! You go upstream, fools!"

A raucous sneer from Julio interrupted him. Simultaneously the paddler's hand leaped upward, poising a knife.

"The gringos stay here -- and you, too, you Yanqui cur!"

The poised knife hissed through the air at Jose. Out from the crew house shot a streak of fire and a smashing rifle report. Jose dodged, staggered, screeched in fury, the knife buried in his arm.

McKay grunted suddenly, fell, lay still.

Tim leaped aside and pulled his pistol, just as another rifle flare stabbed out from the other hut and a bullet whisked through the space where he had stood. An instant later he was pouring a stream of lead at the spot whence the burning powder had leaped.

Knives flashing, teeth gleaming, the other paddlers charged across the ten-foot space between the huts.

Jose, his left arm helpless, but his deadly right hand still gripping his knife, hurled himself on Julio.

Knowlton slammed a bullet between the eyes of the foremost boga, who pitched headlong. He swung the muzzle to the other man's chest -- yanked at the trigger -- got no response.

With a snarl the blood-crazed boatman closed in, slashing for the throat. Knowlton slipped aside, evaded the thrust, swung the pistol down hand on his assailant's head. The man reeled, thrust again blindly, missed. Knowlton crashed his gun down again. It struck fair on the temple. The man collapsed.

Tim was charging across the open at the crew house. Jose and Julio were locked in a death grapple. No other living man, except Knowlton, still stood upright. Stooping, he peered into the red-dyed face of McKay. Then he laid a hand on the captain's chest. Faint but regular, he felt the heart beating.

With a wary eye on the boatman, he swiftly raised the captain

and put him into Tim's hammock. As he turned back to the fight Tim emerged from the other hut, carrying a body, which he dropped and swiftly inspected. At the same moment the fight of Jose and Julio ended. With a choked scream Julio dropped, writhed, doubled up. Then he lay still. Jose, his face ghastly, gazed around him, mouth stretched in a terrible smile.

"So this ends it," he croaked, his gaze dropping to Julio. "Adios, Julio!" he chuckled hoarsely and sank down.

For an instant Knowlton hesitated, his glance going back and forth between McKay and Jose. Swiftly then he ran his fingertips over McKay's head. With a murmur of satisfaction he turned from his comrade and hurried to the motionless bowman.

"Bleeding to death, Looey," informed Tim. "Not cut bad except that arm. That flying knife must have got an artery."

"I'll try to pull him through. You look after Cap. He's only knocked out -- bullet creased him -- "

"He's all right, huh? Everybody else dead? I got that one in the bunk house."

"Look out for that fellow over there. Maybe I brained him, but I'm not sure." Knowlton was already on his knees beside Jose, working fast to loop a tourniquet and stop the flow from the pierced arm. With a handkerchief and his pistol barrel he shut off the pulsating stream. Wedging the gun to hold the tourniquet tight, he lifted his patient from the red-smeared mud and bore him to the nearest hammock in the crew quarters. Striding back, he found Tim alternately bathing McKay's head and giving him brandy. In a moment the captain's eyes opened.

"Some head you got, Cap," congratulated Tim, relieved at the sight of McKay's gray stare. "Bullet bounced right off. Here, take another swallow. Looey, we better pack this crease. She keeps leaking."

"Yep. Dig up the surgical kit. And give Jose a drink. I'll have to tie his artery, too. How do you feel, Rod?"

"Dizzy," McKay confessed. "What's happened?"

"Lost our crew," was the laconic answer. "All gone west but Jose, and he's lost a lot of blood."

For a time after his head was bandaged McKay lay quiet, staring out at the tiny battlefield and at his two mates working silently on the wounded arm of Jose. When they came back he spoke one word: "Schwandorf."

"Yeah! He's the cause, I bet my shirt. But why?"

"Perhaps Jose knows," suggested Knowlton. "But he's in no shape to talk now. Let's see. Schwandorf was going to Iquitos."

"Yes, but that doesn't mean anything."

"Probably not. Well, maybe Jose can explain."

There were some things, however, which Jose could not ave told, for he himself did not know them. One was that Schwan- orf had gone to Iquitos where there was a radio station, a link o New York and the address he had memorized from Knowlton's otebook. Another was that a message had already gone forth:

> McKay expedition killed by Indians. Rand search most dangerous, but if empowered I attempt locate him for fifty thousand gold payable on safe delivery Rand at Manaos. Reply soon as possible. Karl Schwandorf.

## VIII. - THE DOUBLE-CROSS

Noon, sweltering hot. A blazing sun pouring vertical rays own on a blinding river. A long canoe wearily creeping up the laring waters, minus a lookout, heedless of the danger of sunken ree trunks; propelled by three sun-blistered men; steered by a allid pirate whose left arm hung in a sling. Atop the right bank n unbroken, endless tangle of jungle. Ahead, on the left shore, a ap in the forest and a number of boats at water's edge.

"Guess that's it," panted Knowlton squinting at the clearing. A day's journey the Brazilian said. We've been two and a half."

"One day's journey for six hardened river-men, senor," orrected Jose. "Not for three doing the work of six and hamp- red by a cripple."

"You're no cripple, Hozy," dissented Tim. "Anyone that can teer this one-handed after losing a couple of gallons of blood is n good shape. Ease her to the left a little; I don't want to take ne stroke more than I have to. Every muscle in me is sore."

"Same here," admitted Knowlton. "I'm one solid ache."

The clumsy craft veered a bit. The three put a little more unch into their lagging strokes, noting, as they neared the steep ank, that a couple of men had appeared at the top to stare. radually the dugout worked in to the muddy shore.

"Hello, up there! This the Nunes seringal?"

Some thirty feet above, the taller of the two answered: "Si. he headquarters of the coronel. Do you come to visit him?"

"Right."

"Then permit me to help you. The path is a little ahead. Pull p and tie to this stake." The tall fellow dropped swiftly down- ard, while the other stepped back and disappeared.

With a dexterous twist the boat was moored to the designated stake. The three Americans hopped aground with some discomfort. But Jose, after moving languidly forward and contemplating the sharp slope, hesitated and shrugged his shoulders.

"I am tired, senores," he said. "And perhaps it would be well for one to stay here and watch."

The tall Brazilian's eyes narrowed. "There is no danger of loss," he asserted with dignity. "We are not thieves."

For a moment the two eyed each other in obvious dislike. Then, with a glance at his crippled arm, Jose shrugged again.

"Better come along," McKay said. "Stuff's safe enough."

"As you will, Capitan."

He lounged to the edge, hesitated, wavered slightly. At once the Brazilian darted out a hand and gave him support. And while the four clambered up the slope he retained the grip, aiding him to the top. When they emerged on the level, however, he dropped his hand immediately. Jose gave him a half-mocking bow, to which he replied with a short nod. Then he stepped back and let the wounded man precede him toward a number of substantial pole-supported houses a hundred yards away.

"No love lost between them," thought Tim. "Good fellow, though, this new one. Ready to help anyone that needs it whether he likes them or not. Ready to fight too, if he needed."

Wherewith he introduced himself with a friendly grin. The overture met with instant response -- a quick smile and a twinkle in the warm eyes.

"I am Pedro Andrada, a seringueiro who should be tapping trees instead of loafing here. But my partner and I have just come in from a long trip into the wilderness and are resting."

"Yeah?" Was that your buddy with you?"

"My -- ah -- buddee? Partner? Yes, that was he -- Lourenco Moraes, the best of men. He has gone to tell the coronel of your arrival. Have you met with an accident downriver?" He moved a thumb meaningly toward the only remaining crew member.

"Yeah," grimly. "Bad accident." Tim tapped his pistol significantly and raised five fingers. Pedro lifted his brows, nodded quick understanding, pointed to Jose's bad arm, and made motions as if pulling a trigger. Tim shook his head, and the Brazilian, aware that Jose was not a prisoner, looked much puzzled. But their signs went no further, for they approached the dwelling and office of Coronel Nunes.

At the foot of the ladder stood a broad-shouldered, square-jawed, thick-muscled, deeply tanned man, who pointed a thumb upward. Above, in the doorway, waited an elderly Brazilian of

medium height and spare figure, standing with soldierly erectness and garbed in white duck of semimilitary cut. He beamed at McKay and Knowlton, but as his eyes encountered those of Jose they seemed suddenly to become very sharp. Then his gaze rested on Tim's broad face and he smiled again.

"Enter, gentlemen," he invited. "This house is at your disposal."

McKay, with a bow, climbed the ladder, followed by Knowlton. Jose, with a swaggering stare at the wide-shouldered man, who stared straight back, also went up. Tim came fourth and last, for Pedro stopped beside his countryman.

The room, in view of its distance from civilization, seemed palatial. Its floor was tight, its furniture modern, its walls decorated with a few excellent pictures. Comfortable chairs were ranged along the walls, and the middle of the room was occupied by a massive square-cornered table on which lay a jumble of business papers, books, and a high-grade violin. Beyond the table stood a swivel chair, evidently the usual seat of the coronel. Arrangement was such that the master of the house sat always with his back to a wall and his face to the door. And on a couple of hooks on that wall, ready for instant service, hung a rifle.

Along the river the Americans had passed at intervals a few small rubber estates, whose headquarters consisted mainly of a crude shack or two, hardly better than the dingy houses of Remate de Males. This place was more imposing. They had observed that it was at least half a mile square; that its warehouse for supplies was big and solid; that a goodly number of workers' huts surrounded the headquarters at a respectful distance; and that the owner's home was no one-room cabin but big enough to contain six or eight rooms. This well-appointed reception room and the formal yet sincere courtesy of its owner showed that Coronel Nunes was no mere native of the frontier. Later they were to learn that he was a gentleman of Rio who had exiled himself from the capital after the death of his wife to carve a fortune in the rubber trade from the forbidding jungle.

With the correct touch of Latin punctilio McKay spoke the introductions and stated that they were on their way upriver to explore the hinterland. With equal politeness the coronel bowed and begged his guests to be seated. Then he touched a small bell. A door opened and a white-suited servant appeared.

"Cafe," the coronel specified. As speedily as if these visitors had been expected, the servant brought in a tray bearing cups of syrupy coffee. Each of the guests accepted one. Tim, at the risk of scalding himself, gulped his refreshment.

"O-o-oh boy! That hits right where I live! Give me another and make it man's size!"

The servant struggled with his quick mirth and then laughed outright -- a throaty, infectious laugh. The coronel's eyes twinkled. And when Tim fished a damp cigarette from his shirt, nonchalantly scraped a match on his host's table, and, sprawling back, blew a cloud of smoke, formality disappeared.

"As you North Americans put it, 'God helps those who help themselves,' " laughed the coronel. "Let us not be ceremonious, gentlemen. 'Tonio, bring more coffee. And cigars. And -- "

Down behind his table he twitched a finger as if pulling a cork. Tonio, grinning, vanished into the other room.

"How is the rubber market, sir?" asked Knowlton, seeking to divert attention from Tim.

"Not so good," the old gentleman replied. "In truth, it is very poor since the war -- so poor that soon I shall leave to spend the rest of my life on the coast. With rubber selling at a mere five hundred dollars a ton in New York and the artificial plantations of the Far East growing greater yearly, there is no longer much profit in the wild trees of our jungle. I really do not know why I stay here now, unless it is because I have become so much accustomed to this life."

"Why, I thought there was much money in rubber!"

"Truthfully -- there was. Now there is not. The world moves and times change. The world is flooded with rubber. Ten years ago a ton sold for six thousand five hundred dollars. Now, in this year nineteen-twenty, the price is only one-thirteenth of what it was in those days. It scarcely pays for the gathering. I hope you have not come expecting to make fortunes in rubber."

"No. We are here to find men known as Red Bones."

The coronel's brows lifted. They kept on lifting, and he opened his lips twice without speaking. After a long stare at Tim, he looked at McKay, at Knowlton, and finally at Jose. A frown grew on his face. And the Americans following his look at the boatman, were surprised to see that Jose himself was staring blankly at the speaker.

"Jose Martinez!" snapped the coronel, leveling a finger pistollike at the puntero. "What devil's game are you working?"

Jose recovered himself and lifted his coffee cup. "I do not understand you," he replied. "I am but the humble puntero of the crew engaged by these senores. My only work has been to earn my pay. And you may ask el capitan whether I have earned it."

"He has," corroborated McKay. "Killed two of his own crew in our defense."

The coronel's jaw dropped. He blinked as if unbelieving.

"He -- Jose? Not possible!" he stuttered. "Jose -- this man -- defended you against his companions?"

"Exactly."

Coronel Nunes slowly shook his head. Then suddenly he nodded as if an illuminating thought had crossed his mind.

"I see. Jose is very well paid."

"One dollar a day," was McKay's dry retort.

At that moment 'Tonio re-entered with more coffee, long cigars and squat glasses in which glowed a golden liquid. Tim sat up with a grunt and helped himself with both hands. The coronel disregarded the drinks, but lit the cigar as if he needed it.

"At night all cats are gray. I am much in the dark, gentlemen," said the coronel. Would you be so good as to enlighten -- "

He paused, looking sidewise again at Jose as if the puntero had suddenly grown wings or horns.

"All right," nodded Knowlton, biting and lighting his cigar. "We are in the dark ourselves as to why Jose has been so zealous for he has been very taciturn since the fight at our camp. Perhaps Jose also is a bit hazy about our expedition -- he looked rather surprised just now. So here is the situation."

Briefly he outlined the object of the search, telling of the mysterious Raposa. However, from the time of the landing at Remate de Males, he narrated events more fully, giving complete details of Schwandorf's activities, Francisco's offense, and the final attack by the crew. The coronel's frown deepened, and Jose assumed the expression of a thundercloud. When the tale was done the puntero exploded.

"The German," he yelled, " -- he told you we would go among the cannibals? We? Madre de Dios! If ever I get within knife length of him! Nunes, you see, do you not?"

The coronel nodded grimly. "I see that he planned to have all of you destroyed. Senhor Knowlton, the black-bearded man suggested that you take Mayoruna women? He told you they were shapely of body and tried to put into your minds the thought of making them your paramours? The snake!

"He did not tell you, then, that the Mayoruna men allow no trifling with their women; that any alien attempting to embrace one would be killed. It is true. If you should succeed in establishing friendly relations with the men -- which is unlikely -- you would forfeit all friendship and your lives as well, by the slightest dalliance with any of the women.

"He told you that more than one man has risked his life to win a Mayoruna woman? That is true. But he gave you a false

impression as to the way in which the risk was incurred. He did not tell you that certain Peruvian outlaws have sometimes raided small isolated malocas of the Mayorunas, shooting down the men and carrying off the girls. He did not tell you that for this reason Peruvians are considered their enemy and are killed without mercy. Yet he tried to send you with Peruvian guides into their country. He knew the Peruvians would be killed on sight -- and you with them."

## IX. - FIDDLERS THREE

Dark looks passed among the men as Schwandorf's duplicity lay plain before them. Tim growled. Jose hissed curses.

The coronel whirled to him. "Jose! What was his object in trying to destroy you and your crew? You have been his man. You know much about him. He wanted to stop your mouth, yes?"

The puntero's eyes glittered. For a moment the others thought he was about to reveal important secrets. Then his face changed. "I know no reason why we should be killed," he said.

"I do not believe you," the coronel declared, bluntly.

Jose shrugged, calmly drank the coronel's wine, lighted the coronel's cigar, leaned back in the coronel's chair, and eyed the coronel with imperturbable insolence.

"See here, Jose," demanded McKay, "you've had something up your sleeve all along. Now, what is it?"

Jose puffed airly at the cigar, saying nothing.

"What orders did Schwandorf give you?"

This time the reply came readily enough. "To take you twenty-four days up the river and put you ashore. To prevent any trouble before that time."

"Ah! And after that?"

"Nothing. At least, nothing to me. What may have been said to the other men I do not know. Schwandorf came to me last."

"And what do you know about Schwandorf?"

"What is between me and Schwandorf will be settled between us. My duty to you senores lies only in handling the crew. Now that there is no crew my duty ends. I would like my pay now."

"You quit?"

"Why not? I have done my best. I can do no more. I am crippled. I am of no further use to you. Give me my pay, a little food, a small canoe, and I go."

"It is possible, Senhor Jose," spoke the coronel, with ironic politeness, "that you may not go so soon. You have killed two men recently. Perhaps the law -- "

Jose burst into a jeering laugh. "Law? You speak of law? There is no law up the river, and if there were, what then? I killed in a fair fight. I killed men who would do murder. I killed on the west bank of the river -- Peru. No Brazilian can lay hand on me. And though I now have only one good arm, it will not be well for anyone to try to hold me."

"He's right!" blurted Tim impulsively. "And I'm for him. He's got a right to keep his mouth shut if he wants. He doesn't owe us anything. Maybe he's got something up his sleeve, but he stuck with us in the pinch."

"We'll treat him square," cut in Knowlton. "Jose, your own wages at a dollar a day are eighteen dollars. The other five had seventy-five coming to the place where they -- quit. Grand total ninety-three. I suggest their pay go to you. What say, Rod?"

"Make it a hundred flat," McKay agreed.

"Right. A hundred in gold. Satisfy you, Jose?"

"Indeed yes, senor. I did not expect such generosity."

"That's all right, then. We'll fix you up before we move on, and -- Say! Are you in Schwandorf's pay, too?"

Jose hesitated. Then he replied: "Since you mention it, I will admit he offered certain inducements. I now see that he had no intention of meeting his promises. But you can leave it to me to collect from him whatever may be due."

A gleam in his eyes presaged unpleasantness for Schwandorf.

"You gentlemen, of course, will not attempt to continue your journey for the present," the coronel suggested. "You are fatigued and I would much appreciate the pleasure of your company."

"We've been wondering about getting another boat and a new crew," Knowlton said, frankly. "The canoe is too big for three men, and I'll admit we're tired. Jose is in no shape to travel --"

"Jose, of course, is my guest also," the old gentleman interrupted. "The question of new men can be solved, but now is the time for all of you to rest. As our proverb has it -- he goes far who goes slowly."

'Tonio reappeared and the coronel directed him: "If Pedro and Lourenco are outside, ask them to move the belongings of the gentlemen from the canoe. And make ready rooms for guests."

'Tonio disappeared down the ladder. The coronel raised the violin, tendered it to the others, accepted their pleas to play it himself, and for the next half hour acquitted himself with no mean ability. Snatches of long-forgotten opera and improvisations of his own flowed from the strings in smooth harmony, hinting at bygone years amid far different surroundings. At length the player with a smile and a half apology for boring his

guests, put down the instrument. And then, to the astonishment of all, Jose spoke:

"Senores, there was a time when I, too, could draw music from the violin. If I may -- " He looked long at the instrument.

"Certamente, if you can use the arm," the coronel acquiesced. With a little difficulty Jose drew his arm from the sling and poised the violin. A half smile showed in the eyes of the coronel as he glanced at his guests. He, and they as well, expected a discordant attempt at some obscene ditty of the frontier.

But as Jose, after jockeying a bit, began drifting across the strings, the suppressed smiles faded. Here was a man who, as he said, once could play. And he wasted no time on airs composed by others and known to half the world. Under his touch the mellow wood began to talk, and in the minds of the listeners pictures grew. City streets, blank-walled houses, patios, the rattle of the hoofs of burros over cobbles, the shuffle of human feet, the toll of bells from a convent tower. Gay little bits of music, laughter, flashing eyes, a voluptuous love song repeated over and over. A sudden wild outbreak, fighting men, shots, the clash of steel -- again a tolling bell and a requiem for the dead. A horse galloping in the night. Mountain winds crooning mournfully rising to the scream of tempest and the crash of thunder. Dreary uplands, the hiss of rain, the sough of drifting snow, the patient plod of a mule along a perilous trail. And then the jungle: its discordant uproar. A monotonous ebb and flow of life, punctuated by sudden flares of fight. A long mournful wail--and silence.

His bow still on the strings, Jose sat for a minute like a stone image. His eyes straight ahead, his pale face drawn, his red kerchief glowing dully in the semishadow like a cap of blood. For once his face way empty of all insolence, changed by a pathetic wistfulness that made it tragic. Worldess, he lowered the violin and fumbled absently at his sling. When he looked up his old mocking expression had come back and he once more looked the reckless buccaneer.

For a time no one spoke. Each felt that he had glimpsed something of this man's past; felt, too, that he who now was a bloody-handed borderer had once been a caballero. The coronel's face was thoughtful as he took back the violin. When at length he began to talk, it was on a topic far remote from music.

The afternoon passed swiftly, and when dinner came it proved a feast. A tender, well-cooked meat which the Americans took for roast beef was in reality roast tapir. More cigars and the fatigue of the past two days of paddling eventually caused the visitors to seek their rooms.

To Knowlton, who drew from the small gold-chest the hun-
ıred dollars allotted to Jose and handed it to him before re-
ıressing his wound, the puntero quietly revealed his intention to
ro before sunrise.

"Say nothing, senor," he requested. "You need know nothing
f it, if you like. I am here tonight -- I am gone tomorrow --
hat is all. I am of no further use to you, I am unwelcome here,
ınd I go. Have no fear for me! I have gun, knife, and good right
ırm, and I can take care of myself well. No doubt the coronel
/ill be astonished to find that on leaving I have neither cut any
»ne's throat nor stolen anything. I have a bad name on this river.
Yet few men are as bad as those who dislike them think they are.
may borrow a small canoe, but any Indian would do the same.

"Before our ways part, let me say that as Jose Martinez
ıever forgets his enemies, so he never forgets his friends.
Vhere some men would have turned me loose like a sick dog with
ny eighteen dollars, you give me a hundred. And far more than
hat, you saved my life at a time when many would have said,
Let the bloody one die! He is the leader of that murdering crew.'
You had only to let me lie a few minutes longer and you would be
rid of me. No, Jose does not forget.

"That is all, except -- if you will, in parting, take the hand
of a man known as a killer and other things -- "

Knowlton gripped the hand with swift heartiness. He would
ıave protested against such a departure, but the other's steady
ıaze betokened inflexible purpose. So he merely said:

"Then good luck. And if you meet Schwandorf give him our
regards."

Jose nodded a grim answer. "I will do that. And here is
something that may be of interest. I know that before we left Re-
nate de Males a swift one-man canoe left Nazareth with an Indian
n the German's pay. It went upstream while we loaded your sup-
olies, and it has not returned. By this time it must be many
ıours above this place. I do not know what message that Indian
carries, nor where he goes. But he is a short man, and his left
eg is crooked. If you meet such a one, make him talk. Good-by."

Just how and when the puntero catfooted his way out that
ight none ever knew but himself. But before the next dawn he
ıad vanished from the Brazilian shore.

## X. - BY THE LIGHT OF THE STORM

"I can't understand," Knowlton said, toying with his coffee
up the next morning, "why Schwandorf would doublecross us."

"My guess is that he set a trap," replied McKay. "He must be on a friendly footing with some of the tribes above here. He dispatched that messenger to stir them up with a false tale and bring them to some place where they'd be pretty sure to get us. He primed the crew to jump us at the same place, perhaps. Then the crew would kill us or we'd kill them, and whoever won would be smeared by the Indians. Sort of a trap within a trap."

"He double-crossed everybody," grunted Tim. "He better get out before we get back."

"Still Schwandorf might have known we'd stop here for a call on the coronel, and that there was a big chance for us to be warned here about the Mayoruna-Peruvian feud."

"That probably was provided for. Crew doubtless had orders to prevent such a visit by lying to us or in other ways."

"Well, it doesn't get us anything to talk about things that haven't happened," interposed the practical Tim. "Question is, where do we go from here? And how?" All eyes went to the coronel, who sat languidly smoking his morning cigar.

"Coronel, we are in your hands," McKay said bluntly. "Your men, I presume, are all out at work in the bush. We want a crew and, if possible, guides. Can you help us?"

The coronel flicked off an ash and spoke slowly: "I have two men who have no peers as bushmen, the two you saw yesterday. Frankly, they are most valuable to me, and I hesitate about sending them on so dangerous a mission. Yet they might succeed where most men would fail, for they have repeatedly gone into the bush on risky journeys and returned unharmed.

"The older of the two, Lourenco Moraes, has been more than once among the cannibals of this region, and so he knows something of them. He has the faculty of extricating himself from hopeless positions -- or perhaps it would be better to say that his cool head and good fortune have preserved him thus far.

"Pedro Andrada, the younger, is not so steady and cool-headed. Yet he is most capable, and the two together -- they are always together -- make a very efficient team.

"Now, gentlemen, I will not order these men to go with you. If they go it must be their own choice. They have only recently returned from a hazardous mission and they are entitled to rest. If they choose to go, I suggest that you place yourselves entirely in their hands and give them free rein. You would look far for better men."

"We'll be lucky to get them," Knowlton acquiesced. "To them and to you we shall be greatly indebted."

"Not to me, senhor," the coronel demurred. "I do nothing

but bring you men together. Theirs is the risk. 'Tonio! Find Pedro and Lourenco. Let us go into the office, gentlemen."

Chairs scraped back and an exodus from the dining room ensued. Soon 'Tonio was back, and at his heels strode the lithe Pedro and the quiet Lourenco. They ran their eyes over the group, then stood looking inquiringly at their employer.

"Be seated, men. Cigarettes if you like," said the coronel. Cooly they did both. Pedro, catching Tim's friendly grin, flashed a quick smile in return. Lourenco, unsmiling, looked squarely into the face of each and seemed satisfied with what he saw. Both then glanced around as if missing some one.

"Jose has left us," the coronel informed them dryly.

"That is why a canoe is gone. We are ready to start."

"You mistake," the old gentleman laughed. "We do not want him back. Nothing else is missing."

Whereat Pedro looked slightly surprised. Lourenco's lips curved in a faint grin. Neither made any further comment.

The coronel plunged at once into the business for which they had been summoned. He stated the purpose of the North Americans, pointed out their need of guides -- and stopped there. He said nothing of the dangers ahead, mentioned no reward, did not even ask the men whether they would go. He merely lit a fresh cigar and leaned back in his chair.

A silence followed. Again Lourenco looked searingly into the face of each American. Pedro contemplated the opposite wall, taking occasional puffs from his cigarette.

Deliberately Lourenco finished his smoke, pinched the coal between a hard thumb and forefinger and spoke for the first time. "May I ask if you are the commander?" His gaze fell on McKay.

"I am."

"And do I understand that we shall at all times be subject to your orders?"

"In case any orders are necessary -- yes. But I assume that you will not need commands."

A quiet smile showed in the bushman's eyes. He glanced at Pedro. The latter met the look from the corner of his eye, without wink, nod, or other sign. But when Lourenco turned again to McKay he spoke as if all were arranged.

"When do we start, Capitao?"

Tim slapped his leg. "No lost motion with these fellows!"

McKay smiled approvingly. "We shall get on together," he said. "This is not a one-man party. We are three comrades, who now become five. If at any time one man needs to command, I, as senior officer, will do so. Otherwise we are on equal footing."

"Just so," Lourenco agreed. "If it were otherwise you would still be three men. Since that is plain, let me say frankly that your big canoe had best stay here, also everything you do not need in the bush. Two light canoes are faster, easier to handle and hide. Pedro and I have our own canoe and will provide our own supplies. We will pick out a three-man boat for you and load it with what you select from your equipment. After that every man swings his own paddle."

"Each for himself and God for us all," Pedro summarized.

"That's it!" applauded Tim. "Now, Renzo, what do you know about the Red Bones? And have you anything on that Raposa?"

Lourenco shook his head. "I know little of the Red Bone people for I have never met them. I have heard of them, and the things I have heard are not pleasant. Yet it may be that the tales are worse than the people. I have also heard terrible stories of the light-skinned cannibal Mayorunas; yet I have found them not so bad -- though it is true that they eat the flesh of their enemies; I have seen it done. But it makes a very great difference how they are approached and who approaches. It is possible that we may go unharmed among even the Red Bones. We shall see.

"Of the Raposa, I do know something. I have seen him."

All except Pedro sat up with a start. "You have seen him?" exclaimed the coronel. "When? Where? How?"

"I had forgotten it until now, Coronel. It meant nothing to us -- yes, Pedro was with me -- except that it was one more queer thing in the bush. In time I might have remembered and told you. It was only a little time ago. We were returning from the scouting trip on which you sent us. We were seven -- eight -- seven --"

"Eight days' journey from here," prompted Pedro.

"Yes. We were in our canoe when a sudden storm broke and we got ashore to wait until it was over. The place was on a creek about two days from the river. The trees were large and the ground free from bush. In a flash of lightning we saw a man peering out at us from a hollow tree.

"He was naked and streaked with paint -- that was all we saw in the flashes that came and went. The rain was heavy, and we stayed where we were until it ended. Then we ordered that man to come out. He came, and held bow ready to shoot. We, too, were ready, but we held back our bullets and he his arrow. We saw that his paint was red and that it traced his bones; that his skin was that of a tanned white man and his hair was dark with a white streak over one ear. No we did not notice the color of his eyes -- the light was not good and he stood well away from us.

"We looked around for other men, but saw none. We asked

him who he was and what he wanted, but he gave no answer. He looked at us for a long time, and we at him. Then he began walking away sidewise, watching us steadily, his arrow ready. Finally he disappeared among the trees and we saw him no more. But we heard him, senhores; twice before we lost sight of him he spoke out in a queer voice like that of a parrot. And the thing he said was, 'Poor Davey!' "

McKay thumped a fist on his chair. "Davey! David Rand!"

"Perhaps so, I do not know. But he spoke English."

"By thunder! David Rand! Merry, where's that picture?"

Knowlton, already unbuttoning his pocket, quickly produced the photograph. "That the fellow?"

Lourenco studied the face. The eagerly anticipated affirmative did not come. "I cannot say surely. This is a full-faced and clean-shaven man with hair close trimmed. I would not say the two were the same without a better look at the wild man."

"You didn't follow him?"

"No. Why should we? He had done nothing to us. We did look on his hollow tree, though. But it was only an empty tree; a place where he had stepped in out of the storm. We had other things to do, so we got into our canoe again and paddled off."

"You can find the place again?"

"Yes. But I much doubt if we shall find him there."

"Never mind. We've something to start with now, and that's worth a lot. Get busy with your boats and supplies, boys, right away. Tim and Merry, let's dig out our essentials and start."

## XI. - OUT OF THE AIR

Again the sun fought the mists of a new day, casting a pallid, watery light on the livid green roof of the limitless jungle. High up under that roof, more than a hundred feet above the ground, the morning alarm clock went off with a scream, the sudden chorus of monkeys and macaws. Down on the eastern shore of the river, in a little natural port, men stirred under their black mosquito nets, yawned and waited for more light to come.

To three of the five men the somber hue of their nets was new. Formerly they had been at some pains to keep them as clean as possible, folding them with military precision and stowing them away.

"Up to this place, senhores, they have done no harm," Pedro said before leaving the coronel's grounds. "But from here on they will not do at all. The weakest moonlight -- even starlight -- would make them stand out in the darkness like tombstones. A

few more days and we shall be in cannibal country. It is an old trick for them to skulk along the shore by night, watching a camp until all are asleep, and then sneak up with spears ready. I would no more sleep under a white net than I would lie in my hammock and blow a horn to show where I was.

Thus the voyagers learned another of those little things on which sometimes hinges life or death. Even McKay, with his experiences of other jungles, had never thought it necessary to drape himself in invisibility at night.

Now, on the first morning out from the Nunes place, the three Americans stretched themselves in lazy enjoyment after a night without a sentinel. These were men ill accustomed to idleness, and they were now hardening fast to the physical activity.

Matches flared under the nets and cigarette smoke drifted into the air, rousing to fresh activity the mosquitoes humming hungrily outside. Gradually the shadows paled and the weak light reflecting from the fog-shrouded water beyond grew into day. The nets lifted and the insects swooped in vicious triumph on the emerging men. Again matches flamed; a fire grew, and in its smoke screen the voyagers found some surcease from the bug hordes. Soon the fragrance of coffee floated into the air.

Tim yawned, coughed explosively, and swore. "Can't even take a gulp without getting a bug down his throat," he complained, and coughed again. "More coffee! I got a mosquito the size of a devil's darning needle stuck in my windpipe."

"A devil's darning needle? What is that, Senhor Tim?" inquired Pedro, passing him a cup. When the liquid and the mosquito had passed into Tim's stomach, he enlightened the asker.

"You don't know what a devil's darning needle is? Gosh! I'm surprised. I've seen lots of them right on this river. He's a bug about so long" -- he stuck out a finger -- "and he's got jaws like a crab and a long limber tail with a regular needle in the end. And he's death on liars. Any time a fellow tells a lie he's got to look out or one of those bugs will come up and grab him by the nose with those jaws. Then he'll curl up his tail -- the bug, I mean -- and run his needle and thread through the lips and sew his mouth up tight."

"Por Deus! And the liar starves to death?"

"Well, not exactly. Of course he can get somebody to cut the stitches. But the needle is a good thick one and it leaves a row of holes all along the fellow's lips. Any time you see somebody with little round scars around his mouth, Pedro, you'll know he's such an awful liar the devil bug got him."

McKay coughed. Knowlton blew his nose, and Lourenco

squinted sidewise at Tim who was solemn as an owl. Pedro, his eyes twinkling, scrutinized Tim's mouth.

"You have been fortunate, senhor," he said, simply -- and stepped around to the other side of the fire.

Knowlton exploded. McKay and Lourenco snickered. "It's on you, Tim!" vociferated Knowlton. "You dug the hole yourself. Now crawl in and pull it in after you."

Tim snorted wrathfully, but his eyes laughed. "What's the use trying to educate you guys?" he muttered.

"You swallowed a mosquito, but I cannot swallow that devil bug," Pedro grinned.

Tim rumbled, solaced himself with a cigarette, then squatted and joined the others in a frugal breakfast of coffee and chibeh -- a handful of farinha mixed with water in a gourd. When it was finished McKay filled his pipe and suggested:

"Guess we'd better make plans. We didn't take time yesterday. In case we find no trace of the Raposa at the place where you fellows saw him, what's your idea?"

Lourenco, puffing thoughtfully, stared into the fire. "There will be time enough to decide that, Capitao, after we have visited that place. Still, perhaps it is best to make some plan."

For a moment longer he looked at the dying flame. Then, dropping the cigarette stub into it, he continued: "If I were going alone to find a man among the Red Bones, I should go first to the Mayorunas and work through them to make sure of a friendly reception by the other people.

"It happens that I have been twice among the cannibals living in a certain maloca which I can find again. Perhaps you know that they live in scattered malocas, each ruled by its own chief."

"Yes, we know about that."

"Good. Now if we went to any maloca where we were not known we might be killed at once. But at that maloca of which I speak I am known to the chief and all his fighting men, for I once led them on a raid against a banditgang. They will remember -- "

"What's that?" Knowlton interrupted, in amazement. "You led a cannibal tribe on the warpath?"

"Just so, senhor. It is a long story, but these are the facts: There was a band of killers, robbers -- and worse -- who called themselves the Pecarries. They raided one of the coronel's camps where I was in charge, killed all except myself and one other, and used us two as slaves and beasts of burden.

"The other man died from poison. I lived only to revenge myself. There was much rubber of the coronel's, worth much money at that time, in the camp. So, after driving me like a

beast to their stronghold in the hills of Peru, they came back with boats and Indian porters to get out that rubber. On that return journey I tried to kill the leader. I failed, and he had me nailed with long thorns to a tree where I might hang in torment for days, dying slowly. See. Here are the marks."

The three had noticed on the previous day that each of Lourenco's hands was disfigured by a scar which looked as if a spike had been driven through. Now he held those hands forward for their inspection. Then he pulled off his loose shirt and rolled up his trousers. They saw other scars in the big muscles before the armpits, in soft flesh under the ribs, in thighs and calves.

"That was not all. They also put fire ants on me, which bit so cruelly that I nearly lost my mind from pain. Then they went on, intending to have more sport when they returned with the rubber. But after they left me two hunters of the cannibal tribe found me and took me down from the tree.

"Now the Peccaries before this had stolen some women from a Mayoruna maloca and were treating them like dogs -- I saw one of those women brutally murdered while I was captive. I managed to tell the hunters I could lead them to the Peccary stronghold and give them revenge. They carried me to their maloca -- I could not walk -- and told their chief what I had said. My hurts were cured, and then I kept my promise. I guided the savages to the outlaw camp; they surrounded it, and in the fight that followed every Peccary was killed except their leader. Now that chief has not forgotten me -- "

"Wait!" protested Tim. "Did the Peccary leader escape?"

"No. He was kept alive until a big herd of peccaries was met. Then, because he called himself 'King of the Pecarries,' he was nailed to a tree as I had been, and told to make the peccaries take out the thorns. The wild pigs tore him into ribbons.

"So now," Lourenco went on calmy donning his shirt, "if I can find that chief again -- he may have been killed in some tribal fight before now -- he may be friendly to all of us. Or he may not. Savages cannot be relied on with much certainty. But if any Mayoruna will help us, he will. It is worth trying."

"And if he is not friendly?" Knowlton paused.

"We do not come back," Pedro finished.

"Lourenco's idea is excellent," said McKay. "Unless we find the Raposa first it's the only thing to do. Of course we'll not land where Schwandorf told us to go ashore, seven days from here."

"By no means," Lourenco concurred. "In five days we leave the river. If we go to the maloca it will be from another direction than the river."

He began preparing to travel. By the time the canoes were loaded the mists had lifted and the river lay open and empty before them. In the bush around and beyond, the gloom still lay thick. But on the water it was broad day, and far overhead sounded the harsh cries of unseen parrots flying two by two in the sunlight above the matted branches. The world of the pathless tropic wilderness, ever dying, ever living, was about its daily business.

As the paddlers dipped, however, Knowlton held back. "Say, Rod, we didn't tell these fellows about Schwandorf's Indian."

While all rested on their paddles he spoke of the messenger dispatched by the German. Pedro and Lourenco contemplated the river, then frowned. "That may be of importance, senhores," said Lourenco. "It may change everything for us. We saw a lone Indian go past the coronel's place, traveling fast, three days before you came. I would give much to know what word he carries. A short man with a bad left leg, you say. We shall keep watch for such a man. Perhaps we may meet him."

The canoes swung out and the paddlers settled into the steady stroke to which they were growing accustomed. Hour after hour they forged on, the miles flowing slowly but surely behind them. The sun rolled higher and hotter, the silence of approaching noon creeping over the jungle on either side. Then, as the time drew near for a more hearty meal than that of the morning, Pedro pointed ahead.

Up out of the bush on the Peruvian shore rose a vulture. It flapped sullenly away as if disappointed. The bushmen, quick to note anything, paid no attention to the bird's flight, but marked the spot whence it had taken wing with unerring eye.

"Let us cross, comrades, and see what we may see," Pedro called. "If nothing is there, we can eat."

But something was there. All saw it before they landed -- the stern of a small, speedy canoe almost concealed in a narrow rift at the bottom of the bank. In the soil of the rising slope were the prints of bare feet. And Pedro, scanning the tracks narrowly, asserted, "These were not made today."

Up the bank they climbed, silent and watchful. At the top Lourenco took the lead. In under big trees the five passed in file. A short distance from the edge Lourenco stopped, looking at the ground. The others spread out and stared at his find.

Between the buttress roots of a tall tree was a crude shelter of palm leaves. Before this lay the scattered bones of a man. The skull had been crushed by a mighty blow.

The bones were picked clean -- had been stripped and torn assunder days before, and the vulture which had just left had

gotten nothing for its visit. Among them were remnants of cloth, a belt and a machete, and strands of coarse hair. A few feet away lay a cheap "trade" gun. Lourenco inspected the weapon.

"Did he shoot before he was downed?" asked Knowlton.

"No. The gun is loaded. His death came from above." The bushmen ran his eye up the towering tree, then pointed to a large dark object on the ground nearby. "Castanha -- Brazil-nut tree," he explained. "That heavy nut fell and smashed the skull like an egg. Indian, yes. His gun, his shelter, and his hair show that. And that bone shows who he was. See, Capitao."

McKay looked down on a leg bone. At some time the leg had been broken and badly set. The bone was crooked.

"A short Indian with a crooked leg. Schwandorf's messenger."

"Si. No man will ever receive the message he bore. He camped here days ago. Now he camps here forever."

## XII. - THE ARROW

Slowly, silently, two canoes glided along the still, dark water of a gloomy creek overarched by the interlaced limbs of lofty trees. The first, propelled by the slow-dipping blades of two Brazilian bushmen, seemed to be seeking something; for it nosed along with frequent pauses of the paddles, during which it drifted almost to a stop while its crew searched solemn jungle depths reaching away from the right-hand shore. The second, carrying three bronzed and bearded men was only trailing the leader. It moved and paused like the first, but in this dimness and bewildering choas the trio might as well have been blind. The eyes of the tiny fleet were in the first boat.

The progress was almost stealthy. Not a paddle thumped or splashed, not a voice spoke. They moved with the alert caution of wary readiness for any sudden event -- lest they become the hunted instead of the hunters. For the past two days they had moved thus. The last fresh meat had been shot miles down the river, where a well-placed bullet had downed a fat swamp deer. Since that day not a gun had been fired. The rations now were tough jerked beef and monkey meat, slabs of salt pirarucu fish, and farinha, varied by tinned delicacies from the stores of the Americans. Gunfire now was taboo, unless in self-defense.

At length the fore canoe halted with an abruptness that told of back strokes of blades hidden under water. The trailing craft also backed water, and the two boats drifted together.

"This is the place," Lourenco said, speaking low.

The Americans scanning the shore saw nothing to distinguish

the spot from any other. Yet Lourenco's tone was sure. With no apparent motion -- though the wrists of the paddlers moved almost imperceptibly -- the canoe of the bushmen floated to the bank. They picked up their rifles, and turned to the forest.

"Stay here," was Pedro's subdued command, "until you hear the bird-call which we taught you down the river."

He and Lourenco faded into the dimness and were gone.

"Beats me how they find their way around," muttered Tim.

"It's all in the feel of it," was McKay's low explanation. "By a sixth sense -- they find places and travel the bush as an Indian does. Take them to New York City, guide them around, then turn them loose -- and they'd be hopelessly lost in ten minutes."

The others nodded agreement. In the shadows no creature moved. Afar off some bird cried mournfully like a lost soul in the grim green solitudes. No other sound came to the listeners save the hum of the big forest mosquitoes. For all they could see or hear of their two guides, they might as well have been alone. Yet they knew the Brazilians were near, threading the maze with sure step and scouting hawk-eyed for any sign of danger.

A long soft whistle sounded in the bush ahead. Any Indian hunter hearing that sound would have begun scanning the high branches, for the liquid call was that of the curassow turkey. But the trio knew it for Pedro's signal. At once they slid their canoe to shore and quietly advanced in a column. A few steps, and they halted suddenly and whirled. A voice had spoken just behind them. Squatting leisurely between the root buttresses of a huge tree, Lourenco looked up at them in amusement. They had passed within rifle length of him without seeing him.

"Of what use are your eyes?" he chafed. "In the bush one should see in all directions at once. You were looking at that patch of sunlight just ahead, yes? But danger is in the shadows."

Without awaiting an answer, he arose and took the lead. At the edge of the small sunlit space beyond he halted.

"You were heading for the right place," he added then. "Look around. Do you see anything?"

Swiftly they scrutinized the gap left by the fall of a great tree whose gigantic trunk had bludgeoned weaker trees away in its crushing descent. Tim suddenly snapped up his rifle.

"Hollow tree -- and a man in it! Come out of there!"

"Your eyes improve," Lourenco complimented. "But it is Pedro. And that is the tree of the Raposa. The lightning flashing in from above showed us the man. But now I think we must tramp the bush for some time before we find that Raposa again. There is no trace of him here."

Knowlton peered inside the hollow tree. The cavity was almost big enough to sling a hammock in, but it was empty of any indication of habitation. A temporary refuge -- that was all.

"No sign anywhere around here, eh?" queried McKay.

"We have found none. We shall look farther, but I have small hope. If you senhores will make the camp this time we will look until dark. Build no fire until we return. And if you hear the call of the turkey, pay no attention to it; we may use it to locate each other. Stay quiet and be on guard."

The bushmen turned at once and stole away. The others returned to the canoes, transported the necessary duffle to the base of the hollow tree, made camp, and squatted against the trunk to smoke, watch, and wait. Several times they heard calls receding in the distance. Then came silence.

The sun-thrown shadows in the gap crawled steadily eastward. Knowlton tested the feed of his automatic, which, since the fight with the former crew, he kept carefully oiled and rust-free. Tim arose at intervals and paced up and down, eyes and ears alert -- a useless activity, but one which provided an outlet for his restless energy. McKay let his gaze rove over the small area visible to them, studying the contours of the towering trunks, the prone giant whose fall had opened the hole in the leafy roof, the parasitical vines twined about other trees, the thin, outflung buttresses supporting the mighty columns -- all familiar sights to him, but things to occupy his vision.

It might have been two hours later -- the shadows had grown much longer -- when over McKay stole the feeling that he was being watched. He glanced at his companions and found that neither of them was looking at him. Knowlton, sitting with hands clasped around updrawn knees, was dozing. Tim was staring absently at a fungus. The captain's eyes searched the short vistas all about, spying nothing new. Still the feeling persisted. Then all at once his roaming gaze stopped, became fixed on a point some forty feet away.

There rose a rough-barked red-brown tree, and from it, near the ground, projected a blackish bole. McKay was very sure the protuberance had not been there before. He had stared steadily at that tree more than once, and its shape was quite clear in his mind. Was that bump an insensate wood growth now revealed for the first time by the changing sun slant, or --

For minutes he watched it. It did not move. Then Tim, restless, rose directly in McKay's line of sight, yawned silently, and began a slow paced walk. When he had stepped aside McKay looked again for the puzzling bole. It was gone.

With a bound the captain was up and dashing toward the tree, drawing his pistol as he ran. But within three strides he went down. A tough vine, unnoticed on the ground, looped snakily around one ankle and threw him hard. His gun flew from his hand. As he fell a tiny whispering sound flitted past, followed by a small blow somewhere behind him. Ensued a gruff grunt from Tim and the swift clatter of a breech bolt.

Raging, McKay kicked his foot loose and heaved himself up. Empty handed he continued his rush for the tree. But when he reached it there was nothing. Whatever had been there was gone, and the vacant shadows beyond were as inscrutable as ever.

Feet padded behind him and Tim and Knowlton halted on either side, with Tim breaking into reproach.

"Cap, don't ever do that again! If you take a tumble in my line of fire, stay down till I shoot! I came so near shooting you when you hopped up that I'm sweating blood right now."

In truth, the veteran was pale around the mouth, and his broad face was beaded with cold drops.

"You saw him?" McKay asked.

"I saw something beyond you -- couldn't make out what it was, but from the way you moved I knew it must be a man. And then when that arrow came -- "

"Arrow?"

"Sure. Missed you when you took that flop, and stuck in the tree over there. Why did you rush him, anyway? Why didn't you shoot from where you were?"

McKay, with a cool smile, explained his abrupt action, meanwhile reconnoitering the dimness for any further sign of the vanished assailant. None showed. While Tim stood vigilant guard the other two stooped and moved around the tree, narrowly examining the ground. At one spot, they fingered the soil lightly.

"No ghost," said Knowlton. "Barefoot man. Didn't leave much trace. Let's look at that arrow."

Back to the tree they went, retrieving McKay's pistol on the way. A yard above the earth a long shaft projected from the bark. McKay drew it out. "Thought so," he muttered. "Poisoned."

"That smear on the point, is that the poison?" asked Tim.

"The quickest and deadliest kind. Mixes instantly with blood. Paralysis, convulsions, death. The least scratch and you're gone. Wicked head on this thing, too; looks like a piece of serrated bone. See all those little barbs along the edge? War arrow, all right." Turning the five-foot shaft downward, he plunged its head into the soft ground and left it sticking there, harmless.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea to take cover," he added. "Tim, go

down and guard the canoes. Merry, lie in between these roots. I'll go over to that tree where the spy hid."

For another hour the camp was silent. Each of the trio watched with ceaseless vigilance, watching for some vague forms crawling up from tree to tree. Yet nothing of the sort came, nor did any hostile sound reach them.

The wan light faded. The sun crawled up the trees, leaving all the ground in shadow. Then, not far off, sounded the soft whistle they knew. Half suspicious, they held their places until, with another whistle, Pedro appeared, followed by Lourenco.

McKay arose, met them, and briefly explained the situation. They nodded, but seemed undisturbed.

"We can start a fire now, Capitao," Lourenco said. "Night comes and we are hungry. There is no danger before dawn."

He leaned his rifle against a tree and started preparations for a meal. Pedro went on to the canoes, made sure they were high enough against any sudden rain, and returned with Tim. The rising roar of the nightly outbreak of animal life resounded around them. The sun vanished. At once blackness whelmed all except the little fire.

"See anything while you were out?" asked McKay.

"We found no trace of the Raposa," Lourenco evaded.

"What do you plan to do now?"

"Eat -- smoke -- talk -- sleep."

McKay eyed the bushman keenly, feeling that he was holding something back. But, feeling also that this pair knew what they were about, he bided his time. When all had eaten and tobacco smoke was blending with that of the burning wood, Lourenco drew the arrow from the ground and studied it. Then he passed it to Pedro, who, after a critical examination, held it in the blaze until the deadly head was burned away.

"A big-game arrow of the cannibal Mayorunas," said Lourenco. "The point, with its sawtooth barbs, is made from the tail bone of the araya, the flat devilfish of the swamp lakes. If it breaks off and stays in the wound, you are likely to die.

"But in that case death comes from gangrene," McKay remarked. "This point has been dipped in wurali poison."

"You have seen such arrows before, Capitao?"

"Seen the poison before, yes. Over in British Guiana. The Macusi Indians make it from the wurali vine, some bitter root or other, a couple of bulbous plants, two kinds of ants, and the pounded fangs of labarri and couanacouchi snakes. They boil all this stuff down to a thick syrup, and that's the poison. The man who makes it is sick for days afterward."

"Our cannibals make that poison in much the same way. Queer, is it not, that the same plan should be used by savages thousands of miles apart?"

"Rather odd. Must have started from some common source hundreds of years ago. Queerest thing is, though, that a poison so deadly doesn't spoil meat for eating. They say, too, that it doesn't hurt much to die that way; you're paralyzed so quickly you just sort of fade out."

"I've heard that this wurali poison is much overated, that it will kill only birds and monkeys, not men."

"Whoever said that was a fool trying to appear wise!" Pedro snorted. "We have seen the poison death, and we know."

McKay also shook his head. "Experiments have been made with wurali on a hog, a sloth -- and a sloth is mighty hard to kill -- also on mules and on a full-grown ox. It killed them all."

A momentary silence followed. "Ugh!" growled Tim, gazing at the arrow. Wish I could have drilled that fellow."

The bushmen grinned. "Be thankful that you did not," said Lourenco. "That bullet might have killed us all."

After enjoying their puzzled expressions a moment he continued.

"We are nearer to a Mayoruna maloca than I thought. Not the one I intended to seek, but a smaller one. It is about three days' journey from here, and to reach it we must go through the bush. The man who left this arrow here is from that maloca.

"A week ago his brother went hunting, and he has not returned. This savage and three comrades now are searching the bush for some sign of him. Today they separated, agreeing to meet again tonight at a place less than half a day's journey from here. This man circled around and worked along this creek, knowing his brother would hardly go beyond the water. He saw the canoes and sought the men who had come in them.

"He watched you for some time, and if you had not rushed at him he would have slipped away without attaching you, for he was alone and he saw your guns. But when you suddenly leaped at him he darted away, stopping long enough to send an arrow at you. After that he dodged out of sight and ran to the camp of his three friends. He is there now, telling about you."

"How do you know all this?" cried Knowlton, perplexed.

"Because we met him while on our way back. He was running hard, and we heard him, so we blocked him. After we convinced him that we were friendly we talked for some time -- I can speak their tongue -- and he told us about you. He was sure you were enemies and had killed his missing brother, and he was going to

rejoin his companions and then hasten to the maloca to bring all their fighters against you. It was well that we met him in time. It was well, too, that you did not shoot him. His companions would have learned of it, and then -- death for us all."

"And now what?"

"Now we all go to the maloca of that man. We meet him and the other three tomorrow. I told him we were going to visit that other chief whom I knew, and, though he was at first suspicious of a trap, he finally agreed to lead us to his own chief. So in the morning we march. Now let us sleep."

"Luck's with us so far," said the captain.

"Right," replied Knowlton. "We just march right into Jungle Town with bodyguard and everything. Pretty soft!"

Tim said nothing. He squinted again at the headless arrow, then inspected the breech bolt of his rifle.

## XIII - THE WAY OF THE JUNGLE

Dawn came, dismal, damp, and chill. Moisture dripped drearily from the upper reaches, and the gloom and the fog together made a murk wherein the early-rising bushmen were scarcely visible to the Americans ten feet away. Yet day had come or was coming.

By the light of a sullen smoky fire and oil smeared torches, Pedro and Lourenco made up their packs. The Americans, after eating a more solid meal than the Brazilians seemed to require, also rolled their blankets, hammocks, nets, and other paraphernalia; crammed their web belts with cartridges; slung their sheathed machetes down their left thighs; looked to their guns; and announced themselves ready to go.

The guides slipped away for a time, and Pedro, on his return, announced that the canoes had been concealed. Lourenco, bringing back freshly filled canteens, delivered marching orders.

"If you thirst, comrades, drink only from your canteens. If the canteens fail, never fill them from flowing water unless the Indians also drink from the stream. There are always small pools, and, though their water may be warm and stale, it is not likely to be poisoned, as the streams may be.

"Today, and every day after we meet the cannibals, make no suspicious moves. Do not speak harshly. Do not laugh or sneer at them. They are unreasoning and easily insulted, and lifelong foes when angered. Let me do the talking.

"Do not hold a gun in a threatening manner or draw pistols unless you must fight. Then kill. Above all, pay no attention to

their women. Now we go. I lead."

He turned and strode away into the fog as easily and surely as if cat-eyed and cat-footed. Pedro swung nonchalantly after him. The others followed in order, hitching at their backstraps.

The ghostly haze about them now was paler, and through the interstices overhead came no glint of sunshine or clear dawn. The whole sky evidently was overcast. Lourenco's eyes seemed to bore through the shades and the dark shroud blurring the trunks, for his steady gait did not falter.

Worming around gigantic columns, crawling over rotting trunks, changing direction abruptly when blocked by some great butt too high to be scaled, sinking ankle-deep in clinging mud, the venturesome band wound along through the wilderness. The general trend of the march was southeast, but impassable obstacles encountered at frequent intervals necessitated not only detours, but sometimes actual back-tracking.

Finally the ground changed, the light improved, the trees thinned, and the undergrowth became more dense -- and paradoxically, the rate of progress improved. This small growth gave the two leaders a chance to cut their way straight onward instead of dodging about. Their machetes swung with untiring energy, opening a path through what seemed an impenetrable tangle. But the ground was rising and the struggle up some of the sharp slopes winded more than one man.

Then the slope dipped the other way, and they slipped down into a ravine where water gleamed darkly. Here a halt was called while the leaders sought for a fallen tree.

At length, the guides found what they were looking for, and Pedro walked carefully up the trunk of a slanting tree which spanned the gulf. He carried a long slender sapling, which he lowered and fixed in the bottom of the stream. Then, steadying himself with the upper end of this pole, he continued his journey to the other side, where he flipped the sapling back to Lourenco. One by one the others crossed, slipping, almost losing balance, but managing to evade a fall. Tim, walking the precarious bridge and looking down, saw that the surface of the water was dotted with the heads of venomous snakes.

"Are you following your trail of yesterday?" asked McKay.

"No, Capitao. Yesterday we circled. Today we go as nearly straight as possible."

"And you can find the appointed place by this new route?"

"Certainly. Else I should go the other way. Come."

Up another bank they toiled, and on through rugged country which seemed momentarily to become higher and harder to tra-

verse. At length the leader paused and sent his long call floating through the trees. No answer came. After a moment the line moved on, each man peering ahead with sharper gaze, each holding a little tighter. The thought of possible ambush loomed large.

Four savages, hidden in this labyrinthine tangle and armed with arrows whose slightest scratch meant death, could strike down every man of this expedition without a wound in return. Yet there was assurance in Lourenco's confident air, and reassurance in the thought that these tribesmen would be unlikely to assail a band avowedly on its way to visit their chief.

Again the call drifted away. Again no answer came. For a short distance farther the file continued its march. Then, in a small opening where the uptorn roots of a tree rose like a wall at one side, it halted.

"The place of meeting," Pedro said. All peered around. None saw anything but the upstanding roots, the forest jumble, the misty serpentine lianas. None heard any sound but their own hoarse breathing, the solemn drip of water, the insect hum, and the occasional melancholy notes of birds. The place seemed bare of life, yet McKay had the feeling again of being watched.

Slowly, deeply, Lourenco spoke. The words meant nothing to his mates. They were like no words they knew. His eyes roved about, and they guessed that he said they were there as agreed, with peace in their hearts, and that he was telling the men of the wilderness to come forward without fear.

As quietly as a phantom of the mist a man took shape at the edge of the tree roots. Tall, straight, slender, symmetrically proportioned, with unblemished skin of light-bronze hue, straight black hair, and deep dark eyes, he was a splendid type of savage. Face and body were adorned with glossy paint -- scarlet and black rings around the eyes, two red stripes from temple to chin, wavy lines on arms and chest. He held a bow longer than himself, with a five-foot arrow fitted loosely to the string and pointed downward, but ready for instant use. Diagonally across his body ran a cord supporting a quiver, from which the feathered shafts of several arrows projected above his left shoulder. Around his waist looped another cord from which dangled a small loin mat. Otherwise he was totally nude -- a bronze statue of freedom.

Lourenco spoke again in the same quiet tone. The savage stepped warily forward. At the same moment three other naked men appeared with equal stealth from behind tree trunks. Like the first, each of these held an arrow ready, but pointing downward; and each moved with the slow, velvety step of a hunting jaguar. Their eyes searched those of these strange men of an-

other world who, wearing useless clothing, carrying heavy steel weapons, burdening themselves with queer weights, now invaded the wilderness. The invaders in turn studied the faces of the Mayorunas, of whom so many gruesome tales were told. For long silent minutes primitive and civilized man probed each other for signs of treachery -- and found none.

Tim, forgetting the orders, spoke out abruptly. At the gruff jar of his voice the wild men started. "Say, are these men cannibals? Barring the paint, I've seen worse than these at home."

"Shut up!" muttered McKay.

Lourenco, unruffled, made instant capital of the remarks. "My comrade of the red hair has never before seen the mighty warriors of the Mayorunas, and is astonished to find them such handsome men. He says his own countrymen are not so good to look upon."

Slowly the menacing arrows sank. The savages studied Tim's wholesome grin, absorbed the broad flattery of Lourenco, and a slight smile passed over their faces. They stood more at ease. A friendly footing had been established, and the North Americans relaxed from their own tension.

Once more Lourenco spoke, motioning toward the farther distances. The Indian who had first appeared now replied briefly. Two of the others stepped back to their trees and lifted long, hollow tubes.

"What are they?" demanded Tim.

"Blowguns," Pedro answered. "They use them for small or thin-skinned game. See, the two blowgun men carry also short darts in their quivers, and small pouches of poison."

Two of the savages walked toward the rear of the line, and Knowlton snapped a warning: "Let them walk where they like. And Tim; you heard Lourenco's orders this morning. Let him do the talking. We're skating on thin ice -- so thin that if it breaks we drop plumb into hell. Less noise!"

"Right," came the sulky answer. "I'm deaf and dumb."

"March," added McKay. The head of the column already was on the move, led by the tallest Indian and a blowgun man, behind whom walked the two Brazilians. The whole line took up the step in turn and passed on into the unknown.

McKay consulted his compass and found that now the route led more to the south, though there still was an easterly trend. After a time, however, the telltale needle pointed almost due east, and glances at the surroundings showed that on their right was a densely matted mass of undergrowth. Not long afterward another interwoven brush wall blocked the way, and this time the

leader veered to the west. Not until an opening appeared did he resume his southward course. It dawned on McKay that the savages, having no bush knives, were accustomed to follow the line of least resistance. And the distance traveled was increased.

The men of Coronel Nunes, too, perceived this. A halt was called, during which Lourenco talked with the guide, tapping his machete. The march was resumed, and when the next impenetrable tangle was encountered the Indians in the van stepped aside, and the machetes of the Brazilians cut a path. From that time on the long knives came into frequent play.

Suddenly, with a grunt of warning, the tall tribesman stopped. The new route occasioned by the chopping had brought the Indians into a part of the forest which they had not traversed in their search for the missing hunter. Now they stood in a small trough between the knolls, under good-sized trees around which grew little brush. The ground was soft, almost watery. In the damp air, faint but unmistakable, hung the odor of death.

The savages at the rear came forward at once. All four of them spread out and, sniffing, advanced up the trough. A cry broke from one of them. The others, and the Americans, too, hastened to the spot whence the call had come.

Scattered in the soft muck were bones, two skulls, bits of tawny fur, a long bow, several arrows. Around them the ground was marked with many tracks. Most of them were of the vultures which had stripped the bones, but there were others -- those of a barefoot man, of a great cat, and of a couple of wild hogs. The peccary tracks went straight on, but those of the man and the cat showed that a fierce struggle had occurred. And one of the two grinning skulls was that of a jaguar.

The story was plain. The hunter, following on the trail of the hogs, had suddenly met the jaguar. He had shot it; one arrow, blood stained for more than a foot, proved that. But in the few seconds of life left to it the animal had sprung and fatally torn the man. Then, as usual, had come the black scavengers of the sky.

Silently the men of the bush and the men of the north looked down at the brief history -- a story only a week old, yet ancient as human life itself -- primitive man and ferocious brute destroying each other as in the prehistoric days when saber-tooth and troglodyte hunted and slew for the right to live. And as it had been then, so it was now. The living read the tale and passed on, leaving the bones behind them. Only before they went, the Mayorunas threw the remnants of the jaguar aside and piled the bones of their comrade in one place. Then, bearing with them his bows and arrows, they resumed their way without a word.

## XIV. - A DUEL WITH DEATH

Rain came and went. The first night's camp of the strangely assorted company was a wet one, and well on into the day the skies poured down their watery weight. Yet even in such miserable weather the Mayorunas declined to sleep in the same camp with the North Americans. They accepted food, but when it was eaten they withdrew to some cover to spend the night. And the strangers knew that, though their guides now could no longer suspect them of killing the lone hunter, they still were not accepted as friends.

"They have promised to take us safely to their chief," Lourenco assured them.

"How much is the word of a savage worth?" asked Knowlton.

"Worth everything, so long as you do nothing to make them forget it, senhor. Being uncivilized, they are not liars."

The lieutenant eyed him sharply, half minded to regard the answer as insolent. But there was no insolence in the straightforward gaze, and McKay laughed approvingly.

"Among those people there are but two great crimes," spoke Lourenco. "They are, to speak falsely or to be a coward."

"A good portion of the so-called civilized world would fail to measure up to the standards of these cannibals," McKay said. "By the way, have you asked them about the Raposa?"

"No, Capitao. It is as well not to put into their heads the idea that we are hunting anyone here. I shall say nothing of that matter until we reach the chief who knows me."

The talk ended and all sought their hammocks, dog tired from the day's travel. No watch was kept, for, as Pedro phrased it, "We now are in the hands of God and the cannibals."

Daybreak brought sunlight. While breakfast coffee was being boiled the four wild men appeared silently, one with a red howling monkey and another with a large parrot as contributions to the morning meal. Neither showed a wound except a slightly discolored spot no larger than if made by a woman's hatpin -- the marks left by poisoned darts. When the meat was cooked they offered portions to the newcomers, of whom Tim alone refused.

"It's perfectly wholesome, even if it is tough as a boot," assured McKay.

"And I might tell you that among these people it is an insult to refuse any food offered," added Lourenco. "I advise you to forget about the poison hereafter and eat what is offered you."

His advice was emphasized by the evident displeasure of the tribesmen who looked rather grimly at the man who had despised

their provisions. But Lourenco then smoothed over the matter by telling that the red-haired man was sick at the stomach -- which at that particular moment was not far from the truth.

Soon the column was once more on its way across the hill country, which grew higher and rougher hourly. Lourenco, pointing out the absence of water marks on the trees, said that the land of the great annual floods with a sixty-foot rise of waters had been left behind. Nevertheless, the going was fully as hard as on the previous day, because of the density of the bush and of the labor of crossing the deep streams flowing at the bottom of nearly every clove.

As before, the keen machetes of the Brazilians opened a direct route through all opposing undergrowth. When a noon halt was called the Mayorunas informed Lourenco that much circuitous traveling had already been saved, and that by tramping hard until sundown they might succeed in reaching the tribal maloca that night. But McKay vetoed the idea of a forced march.

"This gait is fast enough," he declared. "No sense in exhausting ourselves to save a few hours. Also, we don't want to go staggering into the Mayoruna village with our knees wabbling and our tongues hanging out. First impressions are lasting with these people, and they might get an idea we are weaklings."

To which all except the savages assented approvingly.

Yet it was the Mayorunas themselves who delayed arrival at their maloca -- the Mayorunas and a monkey. The sinking sun was still two hours high and the leader was still forcing the pace as if determined to reach home that night whether the rest liked it or not, the monkey upset any such plan.

He was a big gray monkey, high up in the branches of a tall matamata tree, where he deemed himself safe from the creatures along the ground. Wherefore he chattered impudently down at them and, as the tall Indian guide halted, showed his teeth derisively. The savage grunted, and the man behind him lifted his blowgun. The leader growled at him and the blowgun sank.

With a swift sweep of the hand the guide drew one of those long, poisoned arrows and fitted it to the bow cord, which he had laid on the ground. With two toes of each foot he held the cord firmly on the soil. His right hand lightly grasped the arrow and aimed it at the primate. His left drew the bow up into an arc.

Twang! the cord thrummed as his lifted toes released it. The arrow whirred aloft. Then a snarl of chagrin from the marksman. The arrow had failed to reach the quarry.

It had missed, however, by a mere hand's breadth -- missed only because it struck the limb directly under the monkey, where

it hung by the tip from the bark. The archer moved aside a step or two, drew another arrow, and set it to the cord with more care than before. But the monkey was not idle.

Chattering in rage, the animal leaned down, worked the arrow loose, and threw it aside. The deadly shaft turned in air, then plunged aimlessly earthward. At that instant all below were watching the guide, who in turn was looking at his toes and placing the new arrow. Unseen, the other missile hurtled down -- and ripped across the back of the marksman's left hand.

For an instant the tall cannibal stood as if petrified, staring at his cut hand the shaft beside him. Then, in simple symbolism, he stabbed the new arrow into the dirt. Dropping his bow, he lay down on his back.

"Yuara will draw bow no more. Yuara goes to join the spirits of the dead," he said calmly.

Mechanically Lourenco translated the words.

McKay sprang forward. "No!" he disputed. "Not without a try for life, anyhow! Merry, sling a tourniquet! Quick!"

Knowlton jumped to the side of Yuara, tied a handkerchief above the elbow, twisted it tight. McKay whipped out a keen-bladed knife. In one swift ruthless slash he laid open the arm from elbow to knuckles. "Keep that tourniquet tight!" he barked. "If the blood gets past it he's gone. Tim, the salt bag! Lourenco, tell this fellow to breathe deep and keep it up!"

Lourenco spoke, as much for the benefit of the other tribesmen as for that of Yuara; for the three Mayorunas stood in ominous silence, watching the outrush of blood caused by the knife.

"The black beard, who is very wise, will save Yuara to draw many a good bow if Yuara will do as he says. Let Yuara breathe deeply, that the spirit of life remain in him to fight against the demon of death. Even now the poison rushes out of the arm."

"Yuara cannot live," was Yuara's cool reply. "Where once the poison has entered, there follows death."

"Is Yuara then a coward, that he will die without a fight? Then he is no Mayoruna, for no Mayoruna is a coward. Let Yuara die if he will. His comrades shall carry the tale that, although the black beard would have saved him, he died like an old woman, because he had not the will to live!"

Fire shot into the eyes of the prostrate man. He ground his teeth and struggled to rise and throttle the insulting Brazilian.

"No, not that way," Lourenco went on at once. "Yuara can fight the death demon only by drawing into himself the air in which is the spirit of life. The wise man has stopped the poison at the place where the cloth is tied, and he knows the air spirits

will help Yuara if Yuara will breathe deep and long. If he will not, then the wise man's medicine cannot save him. Yuara's life or death is in his own hands."

In his heart Lourenco had faint hope for the injured man. But he knew the rest of the tribe must soon hear the tale from the three now present, and he was preparing an excellent excuse for the failure to save him. Whether Yuara lived or not, the Mayorunas now would know that the utmost had been done for him, and that fact might make a vast difference.

Yuara, though his eyes still flamed, sank back under McKay's restraining weight and obeyed orders. After the first couple of breaths his chest rose and fell rhythmically.

"Here's your salt, Cap. What'll I do with it?"

"Hold this tourniquet, Tim. Don't let it slip! Merry, fill this man's mouth with salt. Lourenco, tell him to hold it as long as possible, then swallow it. Now, Merry, fix up a good strong salt poultice. The rest of you make camp. We've got a fight on our hands and until we've won or lost we can't go farther."

The Brazilians glanced at the sun shadows and remained where they were. According to their experience, Yuara should be dead within ten minutes at most. Time enough to make camp when they knew the result. The Mayorunas also stood and watched for the shadow of death to blanch the face of their stricken mate.

But the minutes dragged past and Yuara's eyes did not grow dim. His first resignation over and his fighting blood aroused, he battled grimly. At times his deep respirations were broken by sudden gasps, and spasmodic quivers shook his whole body. But he breathed on, paying no heed to the burning pain of his ripped and salted arm.

"He's putting up a scrap!" blurted Tim. "Stay with it!"

And as more minutes passed and the wounded man still breathed, a murmur of wonderment passed among the cannibals. Yuara should be dead, yet he was not even paralyzed. Such a thing was unknown. Lourenco touched Pedro's arm. "Find a spot where we can make camp," he said. "I must stay here to speak to the wild men if words are needed."

Reluctantly Pedro went away. Soon he was back with news of a suitable place. He found all bending closer over Yuara whose breathing had become stertorous and whose eyes seemed fixed. "Going!" thought Pedro. But the others would not have it so.

Knowlton produced brandy and poured a stiff dose down Yuara's throat. It took hold and light came back into his eyes.

"Got a good chance yet," McKay asserted. "Don't loosen that tourniquet. Let the arm mortify if necessary, but hold that blood

away from the heart at all costs. I'll chop his arm off at the shoulder before I'll give in."

Lourenco spoke to the Mayorunas, urging that camp be made at once. He and Pedro strode away and the Indians followed.

"Really think he'll pull through, Rod?" Knowlton asked, then. "If he does you're a miracle worker."

"It's an experiment," McKay confessed. "Never saw this done, but it's worth a try. I saved an Indian over in Guiana once by cutting off his arm as soon as he was hit, but I want to keep this fellow's arm for him if possible. Feed him some more salt."

Time passed unheeded. Sounds of labor not far off told that camp was being built. Presently the five returned, two of the Mayorunas carrying a crude but strong litter constructed from saplings and giant-fern leaves. McKay rose stiffly.

"All right. You can move him," he consented.

Carefully Yuara was transported to the new camp. There the Americans found not only the open shed usually constructed by the Brazilians, but also a similar shelter erected by the Indians. In the latter stood two stout crotched stakes, firmly braced, and to these, with tough bush rope, the Indians fastened the litter of Yuara, thus forming a rude but effective hammock.

While McKay and Knowlton continued their ministrations to the stricken man, the rest of the camp work was completed. Night fell and the wounded man lived on. Supper was eaten, pipes smoked, the regular activities of the early hours of darkness gone through -- and Yuara lived on. His deep breathing had become automatic, and his eyes stared straight up in concentration on his battle with the death demon.

At length he was seized with violent nausea which convulsed him for a time. But when the spasms passed he lay back more easily, and a faint smile flitted over his face.

"Been expecting that," said McKay. "Loosen that ligature now -- just a few seconds... Tighten it! All right." After watching the sick man a little longer he added: "I'm going to eat and smoke. The Indian will pull through now, I think."

When he returned to the Indian hut with pipe aglow, Knowlton asked: "Now tell us how you doped out this cure."

"Combination of various things. Salt is a partial antidote, and I got it into him in three ways -- by mouth absorption, by the stomach, and by the salt poultice which helped neutralize what remained. Ripping his arm let out a lot of bad blood. The ligature stopped most of the rest -- though some sneaked past that point.

"Big thing, though, was the deep breathing. Remember I told you about the experiments that killed mules and an ox? Another

experiment was opening the windpipe of a poisoned mule after the heart stopped, inserting a pair of bellows, and starting artificial respiration. After four hours of this the mule came to life and stayed alive -- though he was a wreck for a year afterward.

"I just put all these together, made the Indian do his own breathing -- and here he is. I'm going to sit up awhile longer and watch him, but the critical period is over."

By midnight there was no doubt that Lourenco's prophecy would come true -- that Yuara would live to draw bow again. Then, when the slashed arm had been thoroughly cleansed and bound, Lourenco spoke once more to the savages.

"The medicine of the wise man and the air spirits have saved Yuara from the death demon. Yuara has fought as a man of his tribe should fight, and so has lived when he would have died. Tomorrow Yuara shall once more see his people, the first man to come back from the death of poison. And he and his comrades shall tell of this man's wisdom."

"So shall it be," Yuara himself faintly answered. "Yuara, son of Rana, second chief of the men of Suba, will not forget."

"Por Deus!" exclaimed Lourenco. "This man is no common hunter, but son of a subchief. Capitao, you have done good work."

## XV. - THE CANNIBALS

Through the long, dim shadows of early morning the little column passed on a last leg of its journey to the maloca of Suba, chief of this outlying tribe of Mayorunas. At its head marched Yuara, his left arm incased in bandages, his face drawn and pallid, his stride stiff and springless, but still carrying weapons and stoically setting the pace as befitted the son of a subchief. He had had no sleep; he had lain in the gates of death; his arm ached cruelly; yet a warm glow shone in his hollow eyes as he reflected that in all the unwritten history of his people he was the first to survive the inexorable power of the wurali. As long as he lived this fact would lift him above the level of all his fellows. Even the chief could not boast of such a superhuman feat.

The undergrowth this morning was not so thick as it had been. The ground too was more level and the footing more firm. And after three hours of walking they came into a faint path.

To the bewilderment of the Americans who expected the Indians to increase their speed now that the way lay under their feet, the leading pair slowed their gait. Moreover, they scanned the trail with intent care. At length, with a warning grunt, Yuara stepped out of the path and began a detour.

"What's the idea?" demanded McKay, looking along the path.

"Probably a man trap," answered Pedro. "Follow us."

"Let's see the trap first."

Lourenco called to Yuara, who stopped and spoke two words.

"Si, it is a trap. A pit, Yuara says."

Yuara spoke again, and Lourenco added: "He says we must not touch it. It is there just before you, covered so cunningly that it looks exactly like the rest of the ground. The cover is a framework of sticks, and the instant a man steps on it it gives way."

After a short circuit around the danger the party returned to the path, and as they went Lourenco explained further:

"Every approach to the malocas has this kind of trap hidden in it, and others also. The Indians recognize the places by some sort of secret signs known only to themselves. The traps are made to stop any enemies who try to sneak up on the malocas and catch the people unawares. Another kind of trap is a spring bow or a blowgun shot by a vine stretched across the path. Still another is a piece of ground studded with poisoned araya bones that pierce the bare feet. It is well that we have friendly guides."

Some distance farther on the leader again left the path, and this time all filed after him without comment. Pedro pointed significantly at a thin, tight-drawn bush cord stretched across the path at the height of a man's ankle. At another point, perhaps a hundred feet farther along, a third and last detour was made, and this time the nature of the trap was not revealed.

Yuara now resumed his former pace and abandoned his circumspection. Before long came sounds of communal life -- the barking of a dog and shouts of children. Suddenly the forest thinned, and the marchers found themselves in a clearing.

Before them rose a big round house, about forty feet high and a hundred feet in diameter, its sides composed of palm logs, and its roof a thick thatch of palm leaves, whence smoke oozed lazily through an opening at the peak. A single low door, not more than four feet high, opened toward a creek a few rods away at the right. Near this doorway a couple of naked children, boy and girl, were playing with the dog, while beyond them a number of women, also nude, were busy at some kind of work.

As Yuara and the tribesmen entered the open space the boy shouted a greeting and ran toward them. Then, seeing the strangers filing from the bush behind the warriors, the youngster stood as if shocked motionless. After a long stare he screamed and bolted for the shelter of the maloca. Other screams echoed his as the women also saw the bearded outlanders. They, too, dived through the doorway.

From behind the house leaped three warriors, two of whom already had fitted arrows to their bows, while the third clutched a four-foot war club. Weapons raised, faces contracted into fighting masks, they stared speechless at the spectacle of the sub-chief's son calmly leading gun-bearing strangers among them.

Knowlton, though his attention was riveted on the astonished warriors, caught the quiet snick of Tim's safe-lock.

"None of that, Tim!" he warned. "Put that safety on. And don't hold your gun as if you intended to use it."

Out of the doorway darted another warrior, stooping low to avoid hitting his head. The opening was vomiting tribesmen, all armed and ready for action, when Yuara reached it. But none made a hostile move when it was seen that the son of the sub-chief was in command and that the strangers seemed friendly. Yuara spoke briefly and authoritatively, and the weapons sank. Then he ducked through the doorway.

"We shall have to wait until Yuara tells the chief about us," Lourenco said. "Let us take off our packs and rest."

He set the example by laying his rifle on the ground, unslinging his pack, squatting beside it, and cooly rolling a cigarette. Apparently he was paying no attention whatever to the savages. But McKay, glancing at him as he followed suit, saw that, for all his seeming unconcern, the Brazilian bush rover was keenly watchful and that his gun lay within reach of his hand.

From within the tribal house sounded the voice of Yuara. After listening a moment Lourenco quietly addressed the nearest cannibal. A slightly surprised look passed over the warrior's face, but he replied and a slow conversation ensued.

Meanwhile the others looked over the array of savage fighting men. Except for difference of stature and build, they were as like as brothers. All were light skinned; all had straight-set eyes with no hint of the slant often found among Indians of the Amazon headwaters; and the cheek bones of all were fairly low. Their average stature was a little under six feet, and most of them had an athletic symmetry of physique.

All wore tall feathered headdresses. All had scarlet and black rings around the eyes, the streaks from temple to chin, the wavy design on their bodies. And each wore in the cartilage of his nose a pair of small feathers slanted outward. At another time the Americans might have smiled at those nose feathers, but as they studied the austere faces around them they found no occasion for merriment. Nor was the tension lessened by the sight of the weapons grasped in the strong hands of the warriors.

Great bows and arrows, such as the hunters had borne, were

supplemented by long clubs of heavy wood and ugly spears. The clubs terminated in balls studded with jaguar teeth. Spears were triple pronged, each prong ending in a saw-toothed araya bone darkened by the fatal wurali. Frightful weapons they were!

Lourenco stopped talking, and now the wild men stood more easily, their holds on their weapons loosening.

"I have shown them that I can speak their tongue, and told them we go to visit the chief Monitaya as friend," he explained. "They tell me Monitaya has grown great since last I saw him. Another tribe which lost its chiefs by a swift sickness has joined his own, and he now rules two big malocas together. He is a powerful fighter, and if he is friendly we have a good chance of success. Ah! Here is Yuara."

The son of the subchief came through the doorway followed by an older man whose facial resemblance and ornaments indicated that he was the subchief himself. His headgear was more elaborate and a wide belt of green, blue and black plumes encircled his hips. Yuara himself had inserted feathers in his nose and donned a headband of tall parrot plumes. The addition somehow seemed to transform him into a bigger, fiercer man.

The older man, Rana, the subchief, glanced swiftly along the line of new faces. Then his gaze returned to McKay. His mouth set and his countenance turned hard. He spoke curtly to Yuara, who replied with one word. After another long, unpleasant look at McKay, Rana grunted a few words and reentered the house.

Lourenco, nonplused by the frigidity of the subchief where he had expected gratitude, glanced questioningly at Yuara. But the young man stood mute, looking straight ahead.

"The subchief says we shall enter and see the chief. We must leave our guns outside."

"Don't like it," muttered McKay. "That subchief looks ugly."

"But we must obey or provoke a fight, Capitao. Besides, our rifles would be useless inside, as they would be instantly seized. Let us make the best of it. But I think you can carry your pistols with you; they are covered by the holsters, and I do not believe these people know what they are. And since Rana spoke only of guns, we will keep our machetes. Come."

"Wait a second." McKay dived a hand into his haversack and brought forth a heavy hunting knife with a gaudy red-and-white bone handle, sheathed and attached to a leather belt.

"Brought this along for some Indian who might do us a good turn. Been thinking of giving it to Yuara, but now I'll pass it to the chief. Might make a difference. All right, let's go."

With confident tread, but with some misgiving, the five

advanced, leaving guns and packs on the ground. Yuara, with a word to a clubman and a motion to the equipment, followed the others, bending low to get through the doorway. The clubman, after a curious inspection of the packs, stood on guard among them, ready to prevent any undue inquisitiveness. But soon he found himself alone for the other tribesmen transferred their attention and themselves to the interior of the maloca.

Within the house the intruders adjusted their vision to the lesser light. Except for sunshine pouring in at the smoke hole and at the tiny door, the only light in the big room came from small cooking fires scattered about the place.

Through a confusion of poles and hammocks Yuara passed with familiar step, and in his wake the travelers went to a central fire around which was a clear space. Beyond, in a big hammock dyed with the symbolic scarlet and black and tasseled with many squirrel tails, sat a fat, small-eyed, heavy-jawed man whose elaborate feather dress and authoritative air proclaimed him chief. Behind him stood Rana and another subchief, lean and somber-faced. Behind this bulwark of tribal might huddled the women and children, staring wide-eyed. As the visitors stopped and returned the chief's unwinking regard the warriors packed themselves at their backs, blocking all chance of exit.

When the shuffle of feet had died, Yuara began to talk. In his deliberate way he told the narrative of his journey, which previously he had sketched only in outline. His three companions corroborated his tale by nods and when the discovery of the slain hunter's bones was described one of those three stepped forward to lay the dead man's weapons before the chief. As Yuara went on he touched his bandaged arm and pointed to McKay and Knowlton. And as he concluded he motioned toward Lourenco.

Ignorant of the language, but guessing at its nature, the Americans stood patiently. For a time all three of the chiefs remained silent, studying McKay, who stood upright with arms folded and belt-wrapped knife partly concealed in the hollow of one elbow. Though it was evident that Yuara had given the captain full credit for saving his life, the faces of the head men showed no signs of friendliness. In fact, they were ominous.

At length the chief turned his eyes to Lourenco who promptly stepped forward and said his say. At the end he turned, took the knife from McKay, unrolled the belt, and dangled the weapon before the eyes of the rulers. They stared at it in obvious ignorance of its character. Not until the Brazilian drew the blade and the glint of steel struck their vision did they show recognition. Then Chief Suba grunted, his eyes lit up, and he reached for it.

For a few minutes he sat gloating over the gift, admiring the bone handle, hefting its weight, while the subchiefs gazed in envy. When he looked up his face was beaming. But the sour-faced subchief at his left muttered something and Suba's visage darkened. His eyes rested again on McKay, went to the bandaged arm of Yuara, dropped to his knife -- the first steel knife ever owned by any man of the Suba tribe -- and rose again to the black-bearded captain. Abruptly then he spoke out.

Lourenco stared in blank astonishment. He shook his head as if unable to believe he had heard aright. Suba, scowling, repeated his words. Lourenco shook his head again, this time in vehement denial, and began to talk. But Suba stopped him imperiously and spoke with finality. Slowly the Brazilian nodded.

"I do not understand, Capitao. But these are his words:

" 'The black-beard tries a trick, but it does not deceive the free men of the forest. The thing which he thinks to be hidden in his heart is known to Suba. It is also known to the chief Monitaya and to his men also. The black-beard is bold. And now his own boldness shall be his death.

" 'Since he has said he goes to visit the chief Monitaya, and since by a demon's power he has saved the life of Yuara who is a man of Suba, the men of Suba will allow him to go in peace from here. But Suba will see that he goes to Monitaya who will know how to deal with him. The men of Suba will take the strangers at once to the canoes and carry them to Monitaya.

" 'If the black-beard thought that the men of the jungle are blind to the foulness he would do here, he is a fool. It is useless for him or his men to lie and say they know not what Suba means. Let him look into his own heart and he will know well.

" 'Suba has spoken.'

"Something is wrong, Capitao, but I do not know what it is. It will do no good to argue. Let us go at once."

Suba snarled commands to his warriors. They trooped out the door. Without another word or glance Lourenco stalked after the Indians, and his comrades followed with stiff dignity.

The savages picked up rifles and packs and carried them to the creek where small canoes lay. The five strangers were allowed to crowd themselves together in a four-man canoe, but their guns and packs were distributed among four other dugouts. Other Indians brought provisions to the outgoing craft. In a very short time the leading canoe started off downstream, followed by the boat of the white men, behind which the other craft pressed close and vigilant. They swung in among the trees, and the maloca of Suba was blotted out.

## XVI. - BLACKBEARD

"Well," said Knowlton, after a period of silent paddling, "no harm done so far. If they want to act nasty we can take quite a few of them along with us with our pistols."

"Si, senhor," Pedro agreed. "And besides your pistols we have our machetes. Yet I believe Lourenco's words to Monitaya will make all well. But I cannot help wondering -- "

"I'm wondering, too, Pedro," said McKay. "It's hardly possible that these people know why we're here, and hardly likely that they have any interest in the Raposa. It's a riddle to me."

It remained a riddle to all for no explanation could be had from the Mayorunas. At the first halt, which did not come until nearly sundown, the Americans discovered that Yuara had been lying in the bottom of the fore canoe, sleeping all the afternoon. From him Lourenco attempted to get information -- but in vain. The tall fellow spoke not a word in reply.

Camp was made, and by Yuara's direction the packs were restored to the strangers. The rifles, however, remained under guard. With the night meal finished, nothing remained but to seek hammocks, for further attempts at conversation by Lourenco met with silent rebuff from every Indian addressed. There was no active hostility, but it was plain that between wild and civilized man stood a wall. Therefore the whites held themselves aloof, said little, and slept early.

"I am glad Yuara is with us," Lourenco said. "As he promised, he does not forget what was done for him. He will remain in control and unless I am much mistaken he will tell Monitaya all he knows of us. At any rate, we can sleep in safety tonight."

So, surrounded by cannibals, the trailers of the Raposa slept far more securely than on any night down the river when their companions had been supposedly civilized.

They awoke to find the men of Suba diminished by half. Yuara, deigning to speak for the first time since leaving the maloca, explained that the absentees were hunting for breakfast. Before long they returned, bearing monkeys and birds which were divided among their companions. None of this meat was offered to the prisoners, who ate unconcernedly from their pack rations. When the meal was finished their attention became riveted on a queer proceeding at the canoe in which Yuara had traveled.

To the gunwales amidships two of the men fastened a couple of small crotched posts. In the forks was laid a pole, crosswise of the boat, and from this, by slender fiber cords, four slabs of wood were hung. Moving close to the canoe, the travelers found

that athwart its bottom had been laid a crosspiece supporting two shorter crotched posts, between which stretched another transverse pole; and from this in turn the lower ends of the four slabs had been suspended. Now the Indians joined the tips of each pair of slabs by carved end sections, and the contrivance seemed to be complete -- a sort of grate, its bars sloping at an angle of forty-five degrees.

One of the crew picked up a pair of mallets, the heads of which were wrapped in hide, from the bow of the canoe. With these he struck the slabs in rapid succession. Out rolled four notes of astonishing volume -- the first four notes of the musical scale. Again and again he ran them over, then stopped. The deep tones thrummed away along the creek and died.

"It sure talks out loud," said Tim. "What is it, a brass band or some sort of a signalling gadget?"

"You have it right the second time, senhor," Lourenco affirmed. "I have heard this sort of thing used, though I never before saw the instrument. Those notes will carry at least five miles, and the Indians send messages by striking the bars in different order. This run which we have just heard is always used first, and no message is sent until a reply is received."

"Bush telegraph," nodded McKay. "Pretty ingenious."

Lourenco turned to question Yuara who replied curtly.

"He says, Capitao, that this is to tell Monitaya we come. But we now are too far off for Monitaya's men to hear. The bars are made ready before starting so that they can be used as soon as we are within hearing. He says also that we start now."

The Mayorunas already were entering their canoes. With cool deliberation the Americans gathered up their equipment and settled themselves for the journey at whose end lay either life or death. The boat of Yuara led the flotilla on its way.

For an hour or more it swung on among the forested hills before the telegraph instrument was put to use. Then it paused, and the sonorous voice of the jungle xylophone spoke. A period of waiting brought no reply. The canoe moved on for a mile. Again the mallets beat the wood in the ascending scale of the call. And this time, faint, mellow, far off, sounded the answer.

While every man was silent the bars boomed out their fateful news. Slow, brief, deep as a bell tolling a dirge, a reply rolled back. And with the solemnity of a funeral cortege the canoes once more moved on, unhurried, inexorable.

At length the crew of Yuara held their paddles. Yuara himself turned toward the second canoe and talked a minute. A signal to his men, and his boat proceeded. The others remained.

"He goes to Monitaya to speak of us," said Lourenco. "He will return. We have only to wait."

Time dragged past. The Americans and Brazilians smoked and exchanged casual comments on subjects far removed from their present environment. The Mayorunas watched them with unceasing vigilance, as if expecting a sudden break for life and liberty. Their chief had intimated that Monitaya would kill these men; this was their last chance to try to dodge death. But the strangers showed not the least concern. And at last the canoe of Yuara came back.

It came, however, without Yuara. The son of Rana had remained at the malocas ahead whence he sent the command to advance. Closely hemmed in, the adventurer's boat surged onward at a brisk pace. Around a bend in the creek the domain of Monitaya leaped into view.

Two big tribal houses, each considerably larger than the one of Suba rose pompously in a wide cleared space near the stream. Before them in a semicircle stood hundreds of Mayorunas -- men, women, children -- all silently watching the canoes. In the center of the arc, like the hub of a human half wheel, a small knot of men waited in aloof dignity, four of them adorned with the ornate feather dresses of subchiefs, backed by a dozen tall, muscular savages armed with huge war clubs. Before all stood a powerful, magnificently proportioned savage belted with a wide girdle of squirrel tails, decked with necklaces of jaguar teeth and ebony nuts, crowned by plumes which in loftiness and splendor surpassed all other headgear -- the great chief Monitaya.

At the shore, beside a row of empty canoes, Yuara waited. He motioned for his men to bring their dugouts to the regular landing place, and when they obeyed he gave commands. Then he turned and walked toward Monitaya.

"I go," stated Lourenco. "You stay here until called. Yuara has told his men to leave all weapons in the canoes."

He walked away after the son of Rana, and if any misgiving was in his heart it did not show in his confident step. Halting before the big chief, he began talking as coolly as if there were not the least doubt of welcome for himself and those with him. Monitaya gave no sign of recognition, of friendliness, or of enmity. Proud, statuesque, he stood motionless, his deep eyes resting on those of the Brazilian.

"Sultry weather," remarked McKay.

"Just so, Capitao," agreed Pedro, narrow eyed. "We shall soon know whether we shall have storm."

"Indications are for violent thunder and lightning soon,"

Knowlton contributed. "He's a powerful man, that chief. Not pot-bellied like Suba. He looks like he has some brains, too."

The progress of the parley was keenly watched. Lourenco evidently was stating his case in logical sequence, recalling to the chief's mind the time when he had led him to revenge against the Pecarries, then going on to tell of the strangers and their search. Yuara's sudden, quick glance at him showed that the Raposa had been mentioned for the first time. A little later his face became sullen, and the watchers guessed that Lourenco was now referring in somewhat uncomplimentary terms to the treatment received in the maloca of Suba.

In a deep, quiet tone Monitaya spoke first to Lourenco, then to one of his subchiefs. The bushman beckoned to his waiting companions. At the same time the subchief stepped out and called two names. As McKay, Knowlton, Tim, and Pedro stepped ashore with the men of Suba, out from the great human arc came two men. One walked with a stiff knee, the other as if a whole leg was paralyzed.

Two strides from Monitaya, the four halted, aligned and alert. The eyes of the chief dwelt long on McKay, and they were hard eyes. Without shifting his gaze he grunted a few words. The two crippled Indians stumped forward and stared into McKay's face. Through a long minute a sinister tension grew in the air. Then, slowly, the cripples turned about and faced their ruler. In tones of men sure of themselves, they spoke one word.

With the utterance the tension broke. Through the long line of watching tribesmen ran a murmur. The clubmen relaxed, and the subchiefs glanced at one another as if disappointed. The stern face of Monitaya was transformed by a wide, friendly smile.

A sweeping gesture and the cordial timbre of the chief's voice told plainly what Lourenco translated a moment later.

"We are welcome. We shall sleep in the maloca of Monitaya himself and a feast shall be made for us. Our lives have just hung on one word, but now we are safe. I do not wholly understand this matter, but I shall learn. Now is the time, Capitao, to give presents, if you have any for the chief."

"I have. But our packs are in the canoe."

"They will be brought up, Capitao. The men of Suba took them from us; now they shall return them before these people."

He addressed Monitaya affably, then spoke more brusquely to Yuara. Now dissolved into open friendliness, the man of Suba uttered four words. Immediately his men returned to the canoes and brought up not only the packs, but the rifles.

From his blanket roll McKay brought forth a cloth-wrapped

package out of which he drew a half-ax, its blade gleaming dully under a protective coating of grease, which he swiftly swabbed off. From his haversack he produced a heavy chain of ruby-red beads that glowed like living things under the bright sun. The two gifts together had cost less than ten dollars, but to the chief they were priceless treasures; and as McKay extended them to him, his face shone with delight. Yet he made no such greedy grab for them as had Suba when tendered the knife. His acceptance was achieved with a calm dignity, to the approval of the watchers.

In the same dignified manner he led the way to the maloca that was his home. The semicircle of his subjects broke up into a disorderly crowd which streamed after him and his guests. Within the tribal house the adventurers proceeded to the central space where burned the chief's fire. There Monitaya ordered certain hammocks removed to make room for the visitors. Soon the travelers were seated at ease in their hanging beds, packs and rifles lying on the ground beneath them, while near at hand clustered groups of Mayorunas stared in naive curiosity.

Pedro drew a long breath. "Senhores, that was a very close call. Our lives have hung on one word. What was that word?"

"The word was 'No,' " answered Lourenco. "Monitaya asked those two crippled men, 'Is this the man?' They looked at the capitao, giving no attention to the rest of us. Then they answered. You will remember that the capitao was the one that Suba picked upon. I shall ask Monitaya when he finishes what all this means."

The chief was giving directions to a score of men who presently scattered to various parts of the house to accourtre themselves for hunting. Thereupon Lourenco approached Monitaya with the familiarity of former acquaintance, being received with a good-humored smile. For a time the two conversed. As they talked the smile faded, and into the Brazilian's voice came a wrathful growl. Finally, Lourenco returned, frowning.

"Capitao, it is all because of your black hair and beard. Through all the malocas of the Mayorunas has gone the word to watch for a big, black-bearded man of some country unknown to these people; and when such a man is caught, to kill him and his companions without mercy. The reason is this:

"For many moons the Mayorunas, especially those of the smaller malocas, have been losing women. From time to time sudden raids have been made by gangs carrying guns who shot down the defenders of the houses before they could reach their weapons and carried off girls. This is nothing new here. But within the past five years there has been a difference in these attacks which has made them much more deadly.

"These raids used to be made always at night and were few nd far between. But of late they have come about also in the day, t times when most of the men of the small malocas were out unting and the women had little protection. Several chiefs have een killed by the raiders, who seem to be acting according to an rganized plan. And what is more, the men who did this were not hance parties. The same men came back time after time.

"A few were killed, but only a few. Being dead, they could ell nothing. But the Mayorunas felt that all these raids were di- rected by one mind. And they became sure of this when one girl escaped and returned to her own maloca. She said the raiders ook her and the other girls to the big man with the black beard vho waited at a safe place a day's march from the tribal house.

"A few weeks later another small maloca was attacked while wo men of Monitaya were there. Both these men were hit and crippled by bullets in the wild shooting that opened the attack. Both caught a glimpse of the leader's face and saw that he was he black-bearded man himself.

"So you see, Capitao, why we have been near death. Suba and Monitaya both thought you were the man. We were lucky to escape alive from Suba, and still more lucky that here were two men vho knew the face of the black-beard."

"Schwandorf!" barked McKay. "I know it's Schwandorf! And I know his game! He's a slaver!"

"A slaver?"

"That's it. Knew I'd seen him before. He worked the same game in British Guiana eight years ago on a small scale. Had a gang of tough bush fighters to do his dirty work. Stole Macusi girls and sold them like cattle to gold miners. Cleaned up quite a pot until they caught on to him, and then he got out of the country fast. His name wasn't Schwandorf over there, and he had no beard; thinner, too, and posed as a Russian; but he's the man. Now he's running Mayoruna girls into Peru. He could sell them to rubber men or miners for good money, eh, Lourenco?"

"Si."

"Sure. And that's why he wanted to kill off his men -- they knew too much; probably were trying to bleed him. He must have a regular slave route and a gang of border cutthroats to do his raiding -- men who don't go downriver. Murderer, slaver -- wonder how many other crimes are on his soul?"

"Those two are enough," growled Tim. "And he hasn't got a soul."

"No soul," echoed Pedro. "You have said it. And if ever these people capture him he soon will have no body."

## XVII. - FEVER

In the maloca of Monitaya a feast was in the making.

Fires glowed about the great room. Hunters came in with birds or beasts which were placed before the ruler for inspection. Fishermen armed with crude harpoons arrived with sizable trophies, and at length two young bowmen advanced proudly with a freshly killed wild hog. Glancing at this the chief added a few words of praise which made the huntsmen grin in pleasure.

Lourenco, squatting comfortably on a jaguar skin beside the hammock of Monitaya, carried on a lazy-toned monologue dealing with his various experiences since his last meeting with these people that appeared to interest and amuse the chief. The others lolled back and studied the interior of the place and watched the activities around them in mingled fatigue and relief from tension.

As in the maloca of Suba, the small forest of poles and hammocks seemed a maze without beginning or end. Yet, observing, the newcomers found that the confusion was only apparent and that there existed an efficient and orderly arrangement. The hammocks were arranged in triangles, and on the ground beneath them lay woven grass mats and hides of the sloth and jaguar. In the space enclosed by each triangle burned a small fire. The hammocks were the beds of men, the mats and furs the couches of women and children. Each fire was the focal point of a family.

Above the hammocks were suspended the weapons of the men: great bows, long blowguns, fighting spears with deadly points now sheathed in thick scabbards of grass, unpoisoned fish spears and harpoons. There were also quivers of arrows and darts and small rubber-covered pouches for carrying fresh poison. Looking around the wide room and remembering the big half circle of Indians who had stood outside, they estimated that in the two tribal houses dwelt seven hundred people.

Tim and Pedro, less interested in Mayoruna economy than in the Mayorunas themselves, were scanning the figures moving about in the reddish haze of smoke. Most were women, all nude and naively unconscious of any need of clothing. Like the men, they bore the red and black rings and streaks on face and body; but, unlike the males, each wore a facial ornament in the shape of an oval piece of wood thrust through the lower lip. From time to time those nearby glanced up and gave the new men unmistakably friendly looks -- particularly several young but well-grown girls who obviously were still unmated. In fact, these last smiled openly at the lithe, handsome Pedro, and Tim was by no means overlooked.

Pedro, mindful of watchful eyes, turned his gaze to Tim's before allowing himself to smile. Then he laughed.

"Do not fear," he said. "My heart is still my own."

"Same here. Especially when I remember these females would grin just the same if the club swingers had spattered our brains all over the yard."

At that moment Monitaya and Lourenco both arose, the chief to inspect in person the progress of the arrangements for the feast, the bushman to provide additional news to his companions.

"Monitaya tells me," he said, "that his people have lost girls in other ways than by the murderous attacks. A number who have gone into the bush near their malocas to get urucu and genipapa to make the red and black body dues have disappeared. So have several who went to the creeks for their daily baths. Warriors who tried to trail them have found footprints of a few men, but always lost them at water. The girls have been taken away in canoes. Even this tribe of Monitaya, which never has been attacked because it is too strong, has not been safe from these stealthy woman stealings. Three girls have been taken within the past two moons."

"And Schwandorf hasn't been here recently," said Knowlton.

"No. It must be that he has agents who work when he is not here. I have told Monitaya what I know of Schwandorf, and he agrees that the women are taken as slaves. I have also told him that when we return down the river we shall see that Schwandorf troubles the Mayorunas no more.

"Fine," McKay approved. "Did you ask about the Raposa?"

"Not yet. It does not pay to hurry business with these people. After the feast is out of the way I will talk further with him."

The five lounged at ease, sniffing the savory odors arising from the reddish clay pots and pans. At length a number of tall, shapely women, apparently the handsomest of their sex in the tribe, laid a semicircle of small mats before the chief, and placed thereon a steaming array of edibles. Furs were placed outside the line of mats. All four subchiefs appeared, accompanied by Yuara. Thereupon Monitaya, with a smiling nod to his guests, squatted within the arc. Forthwith the visitors advanced in a body, disposed themselves comfortably on the furs, and assailed the viands with a vigor that brought a delighted grin to the face of their barbaric host.

Fried bananas, tender fish, broiled parrot, a thick stew of somewhat odorous meat seasoned with tart-tasting herbs, roast wild hog, and other things the identity of which could not be guessed, all were chewed and washed down by a rather sour

liquid resembling beer. Remembering Lourenco's warning, each man took care not to slight any portion of the meal or to show distaste with anything. Throughout the feast the tall women brought fresh supplies whenever a dearth of any edible appeared to threaten. And when at last the feasters were full Monitaya himself designated what he considered tidbits to tempt them.

"If I eat any more I'll bust," asserted Tim. Wherewith he put one hand under his jaw and patted his stomach with the other, signifying that he was filled to the throat. Pedro made motions as if gasping for air. The chieftain grinned widely. The grin became a chuckle when Tim, after a vain attempt to rise, lay back at full length and begged some one for a cigarette.

"Guess I'll have to follow suit," confessed Knowlton. Pedro and Lourenco also sprawled back. McKay compromised with his dignity by leaning on one elbow. The subchiefs and Yuara, with slight smiles, relaxed in various postures. Monitaya alone arose -- not without difficulty -- and got into the hammock, where he beamed down at them.

"Suppose this is a compliment to the chief," smiled McKay. "He thinks he has eaten us helpless."

"Speaking for Tim Ryan, that's not a joke either. Say, who are those tall girls who have been serving us food?"

"Those are the chief's wives," Lourenco explained. He and the subchiefs are the only ones who can take more than one wife. When a girl wishes to become the wife of the chief or a subchief, she works for months making feather dresses and necklaces and hammocks, and when done she gives them all to him. If he likes her well enough he accepts the gifts and she becomes a wife."

"And she's flattered to death, I suppose. Wish they'd start something like that at home. Well, I'm going to take a snooze right here at the table. Wake me up sometime, somebody."

And with no further ado he shut his eyes and drowsed.

His companions lolled for some time, smoking and watching the family life of the ordinary members of the tribe. Monitaya himself lay back in his hammock and dozed. His wives, stepping nonchalantly among the strangers, cleared away the remnants of the feast by the simple process of eating them.

For another hour all hands rested. Then Monitaya sat up, stretched his big arms, looked casually around to see that all was well, and smiled down at his guests. Lourenco, rising to a squat, began a new conversation. After a while he turned to McKay.

"The Red Bones and the Mayorunas are neither friendly nor hostile to each other," he reported. "It is a journey of five long days, so that the men of Monitaya hardly ever go there.

"The Raposa is known to the men of Monitaya, but he has never come here. Hunters have met him at times roving the wild forests, and some of the younger men fear him as a bad spirit of the jungle. The Mayorunas believe in two spirits or demons, one good and one bad, and the bad one is said to roam the wilderness, seeking lone wanderers whom he kills and eats; the people sometimes hear this demon howling at night in the dark of the moon. So the young men have thought the Raposa might be this demon and have avoided him -- it would do no good to try to kill him.

"But the older men do not believe this. They say the wild man is of the Red Bone people, and that the reason why his bones are marked in red on his living body is that he is neither alive nor dead. If he were dead his body would be thrown into the water until his bones were stripped by the cannibal fish, and then the bones would be dyed red and hung up in his hut, as is the custom. If he were alive he would not have those marks on his body, but would wear only tribal face paint. The bone paint is a sign to all the Ossos Vermelhos that he is alive, but dead, and is not to be treated like other men."

"Crazy!" exclaimed Knowlton.

"Yes. I think that is it. His body lives, but his mind is dead."

"Has he been seen lately?"

The Brazilian repeated the question to the chief, who looked toward a hammock, called a name, and raised an imperative hand. A slender savage came forward. To him the chief spoke, then to Lourenco, who, as usual, relayed his information.

"This hunter saw him six days ago far out in the bush toward the Red Bone region. He came upon him following a wild-hog track, and the wild man was very lame, having a hurt foot. They stood and looked at each other, and then the wild man walked away, watching closely and ready to shoot his bow. After he disappeared this hunter heard a long, shrill laugh and words that sounded like 'Podavi.' "

"Podavi -- Poor Davy!" ejaculated Knowlton. "That's he, sure enough! Then he's near his own town now -- won't go far with a bad foot. Ask about an escort."

The ruler's smile disappeared with the new conversation. He sat gazing out over the heads of all, weighing matters in his mind. When he responded, however, it was without hesitation.

"There is neither friendliness nor enmity between the two peoples," Lourenco stated. "Our business among the Red Bones is our affair, and Monitaya will make no requests for us. But in order that we may go safely and return without harm he will send twenty of his best men with us. They will have orders to protect

us at all times unless fighting is caused by our making a needless attack on the Red Bones. Then the Mayorunas will do nothing."

"Fair enough!" nodded McKay. "Tell him we'll start no fight. If any trouble comes it will be from the other fellows. We'll leave here tomorrow morning."

Lourenco translated, but the chief seemed not to hear. His eyes had narrowed and were fixed on the face of Tim, who still lay on his back and was giving no attention to what went on. Following his look the bushman gazed critically at the man.

Tim's florid face had paled. His mouth was drawn and his eyes stared straight up, wide and glassy. Slowly he rolled his head from side to side.

"Cap," he whispered hoarsely, "I ate too much. My head aches, and I'm fair blind and burning up. Get some water."

With a swift, simultaneous movement McKay and Knowlton put their hands on his forehead. Lourenco and Pedro peered into his face. All four glanced at one another. Pedro nodded. His lips silently formed one dread word: "Fever!"

## XVIII. - FRUIT OF THE TRAP

Heavy doses of quinine, aided by Tim's rugged constitution and the fact that this was his first attack of the ravaging sickness of the swamp lands, pulled him back to safety within two days. To safety, but not to strength. Despite his assertions that he was ready to go, he was obviously in no condition to stand up under the grueling pack work that lay ahead. Wherefore, McKay, after consultation with the others, gave him inflexible orders.

"You stay here. Stick in your hammock until you're trim. Then watch yourself. Don't pull any fool plays that'll get these people down on you. Take quinine daily. If we're not back in a fortnight Monitaya will send men to find out why. If they find that we're not coming back, you will be guided to the river, where you can get down to the Nunes place."

"But, Cap -- "

"No argument!" McKay snapped with assumed severity. "You're out of shape and we can't have a lame duck along."

Tim tried another tack. "You're not going to desert me among a bunch of man eaters -- right in the place where I got sick, too. Soon as I get away from here I'll be all right -- "

"That stuff is no good," the captain contradicted with a tight smile. "You didn't get fever here. It's been in your system for days. You got it back on the river. These people don't have it or any other sickness. I've looked around. As for being man eaters,

they're mighty decent toward friends. We're friends. You'll be under the personal protection of Monitaya, and his word is good. It's all arranged, and you're safer here than in New York."

In his heart the stubborn veteran knew McKay was right, but like any other soldier he grumbled and growled. To which the ex-officers paid about as much attention as officers usually do. They went ahead with their own preparations.

Tim erupted once more when his comrades shouldered their packs, picked up their guns, and spoke their thanks and goodbye to Monitaya. He arose on shaky legs and desperately offered to prove his fitness by going six rounds with any of the adventurers. When McKay, with sympathetic eyes but gruff tones, peremptorily squelched him he insisted on at least going to the door to watch them start the journey from which there might be no return.

With one arm slung over the shoulders of a wiry young warrior who grinned proudly at the honor of being selected to help a guest of the chief, he followed the departing column out into the sunshine. And when the stalwart band had filed into the shadows of the trees and vanished he stood for a time unseeing and gulping at something in his throat.

Straight away along a vague path beginning at the rear of the malocas marched the twenty-four, the two northerners bending under the weight of their packs, the pair of bushmen sweeping the jungle with practiced eyes, the score of Mayorunas striding velvet footed, resplendent in brilliant new paint and headdresses, armed with the most powerful weapons of their tribe, and loftily conscious of the fact that they were chosen as Monitaya's best. Savage and civilized, each man was fit, alert, formidable. Nowhere in the loosely joined chain was a weak link.

Before the departure the Americans had been at some trouble to rid themselves of Yuara, who, with his men, had tarried at the malocas during Tim's sickness. While Knowlton was giving his ripped arm a final dressing he had calmly announced his intention of joining the expedition, and it had taken some skillful argument by Lourenco to dissuade him without arousing anger. The adventurers would gladly have taken him along had he not been hampered by his injury, but, under the ruthless rule barring all men not in possesion of their strength, he had to be left.

Now, as on the previous jungle marches, the way was led by two of the tribesmen, followed by the Brazilians and the Americans, after whom the main body of the escort strode in a column. The leader and guide, one Tucu, was a veteran hunter, fighter, and bushranger, who had been more than once in the Red Bone region and withal possessed the cool judgment of mature years

and long experience; a lean, silent man who would have made a good subchief if given the opportunity. With him Lourenco had arranged that a direct course should be followed, and whenever dense undergrowth blocked the way, the machete men would lead.

The path wound on, faintly marked. It was not one of the frequented trails, but a mere hunter's track; yet even this had its pitfalls to guard the tribal house. At one point Tucu turned aside, passed between trees off the trail, went directly under a tree with great steep-slanting roots, and returned to the path.

All followed without comment. A considerable distance was covered before any further sign of the presence of ambushed death was shown. Then it came with tragic suddenness.

Tucu grunted and in one instant shifted his gait from the easy swing of the march to the prowl of a hunting animal. Behind him the line grew tense. The click of rifle hammers blended with the faint slither of arrows. Eyes searched the bush, spying no enemy.

Two more steps and Tucu stopped, eyes boring into something on the ground. The rest, taking care not to touch one another's weapons, crowded around and looked down at the huddled form of a man. A matted mass of black hair, a neck burned copper brown by sun, tattered cotton shirt and trousers, big, bare dirty feet, a rusty repeating rifle -- these were what they saw first. The man lay straight, his face in the dirt, his hands a little ahead as if he had been crawling at the moment of death. Tucu turned him on his back, revealing a blanched yellow-brown face.

"Peruvian," said Pedro.

"What got him?" asked Knowlton. "No wound on him."

Lourenco questioned Tucu. The leader tore open the thin shirt at the left side and pointed to a tiny discoloration surrounding a red dot under the ribs. He muttered a few laconic words.

"A blowgun trap," Lourenco explained. "The gun is set a little way beyond. This man, sneaking along the path, broke the little cord which shot the gun. He must have pulled the poisoned dart from his side, but he could not go far before his legs became paralyzed, and he fell. He died still trying to crawl."

Pedro picked up the dead man's gun and worked the lever. It was fully loaded and showed no sign of recent firing. Pedro cooly pumped it empty, and gathered up the blunt .44 cartridges.

Tucu watched him in satirical approval. Then, leaving the body where it lay, he went stooping along the path ahead, his keen eyes searching the undergrowth. In a few minutes he returned with the blood-stained dart and passed it to a blowgun man. The latter carefully opened his poison pouch, redipped the point of the dart, and slipped it into his dart case among the unused missiles.

"No waste of ammunition here," was McKay's dry comment. "What happens to this corpse now?"

Tucu answered through Lourenco: "It will be left here until police warriors come from the malocas. Men travel daily to inspect the traps. They will cut off his hands and feet and throw the rest aside to be eaten by the animals. He has not been dead long or he would have been devoured before we came. The trap will be set again, and the hands and feet will be washed, cooked, and eaten at the malocas."

Knowlton and McKay flashed startled glances at each other.

Lourenco smiled. "No, Senhor Tim will not be expected to eat man meat," he assured. "I thought of that before we left. So without letting Monitaya know why I spoke, I told him you believed the flesh of an enemy to be poisonous, and that you would not eat it on that account. Monitaya will remember that."

"You have a head on your shoulders!" Knowlton complimented. "I was worried for a minute."

The Mayorunas separated and went into the forest, seeking any sign of other enemies.

"Queer that this fellow should come here alone -- if he was alone," added Knowlton. "Suppose he's the fellow that's been swiping stray girls? Or a spy?"

"Neither, I think, senhor. The girls were captured by more than one man, and I doubt if this one had been here before. Probably he was one of those lone prowlers of the bush whose hand is against every man. The jungle is well rid of him."

"Guess you're right. Say, I'd like to see how that blowgun trap operates. I don't understand what blows the dart."

"I do not know either, senhor. Perhaps Tucu will show us."

The guide after a moment's hesitation pointed along the trail and stalked away, the others at his heels. A few yards into the bush he revealed the long barrel of a blowgun, lashed to a couple of small trees and pointing toward the path.

Tucu stepped to the mouthpiece of the tube and pointed to a sapling, just behind and in line with it, which had been cut off at shoulder height. From the tip of this thin trunk dangled a wide strip of bark. The savage, indicating this, stood as if the action of the device would be perfectly clear.

"Too deep for me," admitted McKay, after a puzzled study. The others nodded and Lourenco confessed the blindness of all.

Tucu bent the sapling far over and released it. As it sprang erect the bark strip slapped the end of the gun. Also, the watchers saw something hitherto unnoticed -- a thin, flexible vine attached to the top of the thin stump. Lourenco's face brightened.

"See comrades, this is it: The little tree is bent far down and held by the long vine. The vine passes around a low branch, then up over other limbs and out across the path, where it is fastened to a root near the ground. A man following the path breaks the vine. The little tree then flies up and the bark sheet strikes the wide mouthpiece of the gun. The air forced into the mouthpiece by the blow of the bark shoots the little dart. The dart does not fly as hard as if blown by a man, but it goes swiftly enough to pierce the skin of anything except a tapir."

"Mighty ingenious apparatus," Knowlton mused. "These people are no fools, I'll say."

"You say rightly," Pedro muttered. Turning, they went out to the path, looking askance at the death tube as they passed.

The scouting Mayorunas returned, having found nothing. Tucu resumed his place at the head of the line. Without a backward glance, the column swung into its accustomed gait.

The Americans had looked for the first time on the work of the Mayoruna traps; had observed the cold-blooded way in which the Indians handled the still form; had visualized the forthcoming mutilation and the resultant cannibal rites. More vividly than ever they realized that these men and Monitaya himself were relentless creatures of the jungle, and that, despite the present existent friendliness, there yawned between them and their barbarous allies an impassable gulf.

For the moment the jungle itself seemed a poisonous green abyss of creeping, crawling, sneaking death. And though they had faced death too often to fear it in any form, their eyes were somber as in their hearts echoed the last appeal of the man they had left behind them: "You're not going to desert me among a bunch of man eaters -- "

## XIX. - THE RED BONES

Four days the expedition tramped steadily onward through the rugged labyrinthine hills. Four nights its members slept in utter exhaustion. Neither by day nor by night was any sign of the Raposa seen, nor of any other human being.

The Americans began to picture the mysterious wild man as a mere legendary creature, never to be found even though they searched the inscrutable forests until the end of time. Yet when, on the fifth day, Tucu informed them that they now were nearing the principal settlement of the Red Bones, the announcement cheered them as if they were about to enter a civilized city and there meet David Rand safe and sane.

Not that any chance of striking his trail had been neglected. was thoroughly understood that if he were met anywhere he was be made prisoner, and that thereafter the back trail should be ken. Tucu had been impressed with the fact that the whole jour- ey was to find the wild man, and that he must not be killed.

Now, as the end of the long, pathless trail approached, arose question of which McKay had previously thought -- how to con- erse with the Red Bone chief. Tucu was asked if the Red Bones poke the Mayoruna tongue. Tucu replied that they did not. He dded, however, that the languages were not so dissimilar as to revent some sort of understanding being reached between mem- ers of the two tribes. The veteran bushman nodded carelessly.

"When the tongue fails the hands still can talk," he said. "It kes more time and work, that is all. Ah, here is a path!"

It was so. For the first time since leaving the Monitaya egion a path lay under their feet. And for the first time Tucu nd his fellow Mayorunas, glancing along it, showed hesitation.

"Why the delay?" snapped McKay.

"They suspect traps. I will go ahead and feel out the way. I ave done it before on other paths."

After a few words to Tucu, Lourenco cut a long, slim pole. ith it he preceded the column, walking slowly, pausing some- mes, continually prodding the path and studying it with un- werving gaze. The thin but rigid feeler was ten feet long and trong enough to tip the cover of any pit or spring any concealed ow or blowgun. Progress was necessarily slow, but it was sure.

They advanced perhaps half a mile. Not once did they have to eave the path, but Lourenco's caution did not diminish. Rather, increased as they neared the Red Bone town. At length another ath joined the one on which they were traveling. Here Lourenco aused to inpsect the ground and the bush with extreme care.

Suddenly he cocked his head as if listening. Then, with a ackward motion of the hand to enjoin silence, he faced down the ranch path and stood calmly waiting.

To those behind came a light rustle of leaves and a scuffle of oving feet; a sudden cessation; then Lourenco's voice speaking someone concealed behind the intervening undergrowth. His ne was slow, quiet, easy -- the tone which, even if the words ere not understood, would sooth suspicious minds. After an- ther short silence he resumed talking, pointing carelessly to the lent file of Mayorunas. A guttural voice replied. A head peered autiously from the bush, stared at Tucu, and withdrew. The oice sounded again. Immediately three Indians stepped into ew, poised for action. An interval of staring and they relaxed.

"Come forward, comrades," said Lourenco. They came, halting at the junction of trails. Tucu spoke to one of the newcomers, who scowled in partial understanding and grunted some sort of answer.

Man for man, these Red Bones were in every way inferior to the men of Monitaya. Their bodies were more gaunt, their foreheads lower, and their expressions much less intelligent. Furthermore, they wore not even the bark-cloth clouts which formed the sole body covering of the Mayorunas. The one point of similarity between the two tribes was that the faces of the Red Bone men were streaked with red dye. But the facial design was much different; two short transverse stripes on the forehead, and three lines on each cheek. Studying those visages, Knowlton recalled Schwandorf's statement that these people not only ate human flesh, but tortured prisoners of war. It was easy to believe.

McKay shifted his position, and at once the eyes of the three Red Bones widened and riveted on his face. Heretofore they had seen only his hat and eyes. Now that they saw his black-bearded jaw, they started slightly and peered intently at him.

"I think, Capitao, you would do well to shave," said Pedro.

"Guess you're right," the captain granted.

But then one of the Red Bone men came forward, still squinting narrowly, and his expression was not hostile. It was more friendly than it had yet been. After a closer scrutiny, his face turned blank. Slowly he stepped back, muttering something.

At this Pedro's eyes narrowed speculatively. But his expression did not change, and he said nothing.

A lengthy conference took place between Lourenco and Tucu and the Red Bone tribesmen; a difficult talk in which words and sign language both were used and frequently repeated. Eventually an understanding was reached. The three stepped back, picked up some small game, and led the way along the path. Lourenco cast aside his poke stick and resumed his usual place in the column.

This path was without traps, and it was much broader and firmer so that travel on it was far easier. After twenty minutes of rapid tramping it debouched abruptly into a cleared space.

Before them lay a town of small, low huts, crowded closely together in two parallel rows which curved together at one end. The other end lay open, giving access to a sizable creek whereon floated canoes. At the water's edge and among the damp-looking huts moved naked figures of men and women in sluggish activity.

"Comrades, we have reached the end of our trail," said Lourenco, running a cool eye over the place. "Now all we have to do is find your Raposa and get him away alive."

"That's all," Knowlton echoed, unsmiling. "The reception committee is forming now."

A shrill yell ran along the line of houses, and men armed with hastily seized weapons swarmed into the stumpy street. Confused exclamations sounded, and a compact detachment of warriors came jogging toward the newcomers. The three guides drew away, and the Mayorunas promptly fitted arrows to their bows, lifted their blowguns, and waited with eyes glittering for whatever might befall.

A couple of rods away the Red Bones halted. A hatchet-faced savage who seemed to be in command rasped something at the three hunters. Tucu strode out four paces beyond his own men and stopped. Then both parties waited while the hunters reported what they knew to the Red Bone leader.

"What did you tell them, Lourenco?" asked McKay.

"That we came on a friendly visit to the chief, for whom we had important words. Nothing of the Raposa. They wasted much time arguing that we must tell them all our business and let them inform the chief. We told them our talk was for the chief alone. So, having no choice, they led us in."

McKay made no comment. His steady eyes had caught a simultaneous head movement of the Red Bones -- a peering movement, as if all were seeking one man among the new arrivals. Pedro observed this, and he spoke softly to Lourenco:

"Tell Tucu to say to the Red Bones that we come led by a black-bearded man; that this blackbeard comes from the far-off country where all men wear black beards; that the blackbeard will speak with the chief only."

Lourenco repeated the message to Tucu, who moved his head slightly, but gave no other sign of having heard.

"Now, Capitao, step forward a little and show yourself more clearly," prompted Pedro.

With a puzzled glance McKay did so. He saw that the eyes of the younger man held a dancing gleam, but he could not read the thought behind them. Yet he noticed that when he stepped out the Red Bones all focused their gaze on him. More than that, the spokesman of the three hunters pointed at him and said something to the sharp-featured leader.

Now that leader came forward alone. Six feet from Tucu he halted again and talked in a frowling tone. The Mayoruna, cool and dignified, made answer. After an exchange Tucu turned his head and motioned to Lourenco, who went forward, listened, replied shortly, and came back. Meanwhile the first detachment of Red Bones had been strongly reinforced. Now the expedition was

outnumbered at least four to one by hard-faced, brute-mouthed, naked men ready, if not eager, for trouble.

"He says we shall see the chief," Lourenco stated. At first he insisted that we all lay down our arms. Tucu has told him we lay down our arms for no man; that we come in peace -- otherwise there would be many more of us; that we leave in peace unless the Red Bones bring on a fight. In that case, though we are few, there lies behind us the power of Monitaya and the Mayoruna chiefs, strong enough to wipe the Red Bones from the earth."

"Strong stuff, that," said Knowlton.

"Strong, yes. But no stronger than is needed to impress these people. Tucu intends to prevent trouble if he can; and often the best way is to make the other man realize what may happen to him if he starts it. Also he has orders from Monitaya to stay with us at all times, and he will follow that order even if you, Capitao, try to change it. Now we go together to the chief."

He nodded to Tucu, who grunted to the Red Bone leader. The hatchet-face in turn shouted something to the men behind. Slowly they drew apart into two groups.

"You are the leader, Capitao," suggested Lourenco. Promptly McKay marched forward, head up, eyes front, face bleak. The rest followed, Tucu falling in behind McKay when the captain passed. Preceded by the Red Bone spokesman, the line advanced between two bodies of warriors.

In the very center of a loop joining two rows of huts was a house twice as big as any other. From its doorway the inhabitant of that house could watch the whole life of the town. Obviously it was the home of the chief.

At its door a pair of warriors stood guard, but of the ruler himself there was no sign. Ten paces from it the leader stopped and motioned to McKay to halt. As the captain and the line behind him did so he stalked onward, passed through the doorway into the dimness beyond. With one accord the members of the visiting party looked around them.

The street behind was filled with the mass of Red Bone warriors who had trooped after the column. All exit in that direction was blockaded, but McKay spoke.

"If fighting starts, have the Mayorunas take cover along these houses on each side. We who have guns will use the chief's house. We can sweep the whole street from there. You two fellows capture the chief alive if possible. He'll be more useful as a hostage than as a corpse."

Pedro beamed approval of this swiftly formed plan. Lourenco muttered to Tucu, who in turned passed the word down the line.

Presently the Red Bone man came out. He shouted a name. rom the doorway near at hand an old man stepped forth and ad- anced, limping a little, to the hatchet-face. The latter talked riefly to him, then to Tucu. The Mayoruna leader pointed to ourenco. The old man spoke to the Brazilian, who answered at nce. Then the wizened old fellow entered the chief's house.

"That old man speaks the Mayoruna tongue quite well," said ourenco. "He says you and I shall enter and talk through his outh with the chief. All others remain outside, and we must eave our rifles here."

"All right. Glad we can leave Tucu out here to control these ellows. Here, Merry." He passed his rifle to Knowlton. Pedro ook Lourenco's gun. With packs still on their backs the men ntered the house where waited the ruler of the Red Bone tribe.

Behind them the line settled into easier postures of waiting, nd the visitors were now able to inspect the huts nearest them. n some of these, women stood near the doorways, staring in un- inking absorption at the athletic men outside who were so much etter to look upon than their own mates. The Mayorunas re- urned the stares with the brief glances of men accustomed to oticing everything but totally uninterested -- for these poorly haped, heavy-mouthed, mud-skinned females were not to be ompared with their own women.

Knowlton and Pedro glanced into other huts, and in a couple f these they saw rigid red-hued objects hanging from the roofs.

"The red bones of the dead, senhor," Pedro muttered, and is companion peered again at the sinister items without reply.

Voices came to them from the chief's house, talking with roning deliberation. Evidently no cause for friction had yet risen. They let their eyes rove on beyond the guarded doorway, pause at a house a short distance away at the right. There tood a clubman, who leaned idly on his weapon, but showed no ntent to move. The door of the house was barred from without.

"Looks like a jail," said Knowlton. Pedro smiled, but a look ame into his face and he studied the closed house.

Suddenly both started. At one corner of the house, unseen by e clubman, a head had cautiously slipped forth. For only an in- ant it hung there before dodging back out of sight. But both the atching men had seen that the face, though half masked by long ark hair and a thick beard, was much lighter than that of any ed Bone savage. And in the hair above one ear was a white reak.

## XX. - THE RAPOSA

The man who sat in the musty-smelling room was the chief of the Red Bones. He was called Umanuh, and he was a living cadaver. Gaunt, gray skinned, lank haired, hollow of cheek and eye, with thin cruel lips so tight drawn that the teeth behind seemed to show through, ribs projecting, clawlike hands resting on bony knees, his whole frame motionless as that of a man long dead, the head man was the antithesis of both the piggish Suba and the herculean Monitaya. Only his eyes lived; and they were cold and merciless as those of a vulture. A man who ruled by ruthless cunning, who would gaze unmoved on the most ghastly tortures, who would devour human flesh with ghoulish relish -- such was the creature who sat in a red-dyed hammock and contemplated the impassive face of McKay.

"Umanuh, great chief, eater of his enemies with fangs of the jaguar and wisdom of the great snake, awaits the greeting of the one-whose-hair-grows-from-his-mouth," droned the spokesman.

"Makkay, leader of fighting men of the Blackbeards, whose voice is the thunder and whose hand spits lightning and death, gives greeting to Umanuh," responded Lourenco.

A pause. Umanuh gave no sign of life. McKay straight and cold met the unwinking stare of the chief with his own chill gaze.

"Makkay brings with him none of the Blackbeard warriors," pointed out the interpreter. "He comes with only jungle men."

"Makkay needs none of his own warriors when he comes in peace. If he came in war the terrible Blackbeards with him would cause the whole forest to fly apart in smoke and flame. Since he walks in peace to visit his friend Umanuh, of whose wisdom he has heard, he brings only his friends the Mayorunas, who are friends also to the men of the Red Bones."

The silent duel between McKay and Umanuh went on. At length the chief's eyes flickered a trifle. In a hissing whisper he said something which the old man promptly interpreted.

"The men of the Mayorunas never come here unless seeking something. What do they seek?"

"Only that which Makkay seeks."

Then turning to the captain, the Brazilian added: "Capitao, we now have reached the point to talk business. Have you any presents? And is it your wish to give them now or later?"

"I have a few things. But I'll give them later if at all. This chief is hostile. Tell him why we're here and see how he acts."

"It has come to the ears of Makkay that a man of the Blackbeards lives among the Red Bones. Makkay would see him."

The interpreter awaited the chief's voice before answering. "No man of the Blackbeards is among the men of Umanuh."

"If he is not among them he is near," was Lourenco's reply. "He has been seen by the Mayorunas, and I, too, have seen him. He bears on his bones the sign that his mind is out of his skull. His eyes are green and his hair touched with white. Umanuh and his men know well that I speak true."

A long pause. "There was such a man, but he is gone."

"Then Makkay asks his friend Umanuh to find that one. A chief so wise can easily find him where others would fail."

"If he could be found what would be done with him?"

Lourenco thought swiftly. "If a Red Bone man abandoned his people, what would Umanuh do to him when he was found?"

A cold glimmer appeared in the chief's eyes. He would like to see what sort of torture this hard-faced Blackbeard would use on a fugitive. It might be even more fiendish than his own pastimes. So the next reply came promptly.

"If that man is found the Blackbeard will pay for him?"

"There are gifts of friendship for Umanuh."

"This Blackbeard will pay more than the other Blackbeard?"

Lourenco almost blinked. What other Blackbeard? The Brazilian repressed his bewilderment.

"Makkay will first see the man to make sure he is the Blackbeard whom Makkay wants. Then he will pay well."

"Umanuh will see the gifts now."

"The gifts cannot be shown. They are packed away."

Another eye duel between the chief and McKay. As before, the captain's eye proved the harder.

"Umanuh will think of the matter. Night comes. The man hunted by the Blackbeard is not here. The Blackbeard and his men may stay tonight across the water. When the sun rises again Umanuh will talk further.

"It is well. Let Umanuh's men stay on this side of the water, that we may not mistake them in the night for enemies."

McKay, with stiff stride, stalked out. Lourenco followed. Both felt the snake eyes of the cadaverous chief dwelling on their backs. To the waiting group, it was briefly explained that preliminary negotiations had been concluded and that camp now would be made on the farther side of the creek. The Mayorunas began to move out, marching in reverse order, the Red Bone mass dividing to let them pass. Pedro muttered to his partner.

"Lourenco, see that house with the barred door where the clubman stands guard. Remember where it is."

The other swept the loop in one quick glance, located the

house, and fell into step without a word, the guarded structure fixed carefully on his brain. He said, quietly, "There will be a small moon tonight."

"You become a reader of the mind," grinned Pedro.

Down to the creek trooped the party, followed closely by a score of tribesmen. They paddled across in waiting canoes, and, in other dugouts the Red Bone men also crossed. When the borrowed boats were empty the tribesmen took them in tow and returned to their own bank. The visitors were left on a partly cleared shore, separated from their hosts by some twenty yards of water. The Red Bones now began activities to establish a night-long watch on their side of the stream.

"Taking no chances of our raiding them tonight," said Knowlton. "Keeping everything in their own hands. We'd better post sentries just to keep an eye on that outpost of theirs."

"We four will take it in turn," McKay agreed. "Lourenco -- Pedro -- you -- I. Three-hour tours."

"Pardon, Capitao," interposed Pedro. "It would be well to change that. You two senhores take the first two watches."

"Why?" frowned McKay.

"Because Lourenco and I wish to go visiting."

The captain's frown deepened, but he studied Pedro's face keenly. "What's up your sleeve? Out with it!"

Pedro glanced around. Tribesmen, both of the Mayorunas and of the Red Bones, were watching the colloquy.

"We are watched, Capitao. Let us make camp now and talk later."

Later, when the camp was made at the edge of the bush and the four were grouped in their hammocks, Lourenco narrated in detail the conversation with Umanuh. Knowlton reciprocated with news of what he had seen at the corner of the barred house.

"I almost jumped after him, Rod," he admitted. "But I knew anything sudden might start war right there and we wouldn't have a chance of getting away with him. But he's here, and old Umanuh's a liar by the clock if he says otherwise."

"He is the same man we saw in the forest, Lourenco, or my eyes are twisted," added Pedro.

"It is very strange," Lourenco mused. "The man is within call, yet Umanuh says he is not here. And Umanuh wants us to buy the man. What is more, he asks if we will pay more than the other Blackbeard. What other Blackbeard? There are no other men with black beards -- except the German woman-stealer; and of course he cannot be the one."

"No?" Pedro asked, softly.

"What about that visiting trip of yours? McKay asked.

"I wish to see what is in that house with the barred door, Capitao. Lourenco is also curious that we should visit that house. Something calls me to it."

"Too dangerous," interposed McKay. "Also unnecessary. We'll get Rand through the chief. Your night spying might ruin everything and get you killed in the bargain. Nothing to gain."

"Capitao," replied Lourenco, "I think we had best do as Pedro says. It is a queer thing and I cannot explain it, but I have known him to have such ideas in the past and they have always worked out for the best. He himself does not know why he does some things that look totally foolish and which often are very dangerous -- except that he feels like doing them."

"Up in the states," came Knowlton's observation, "we'd say Pedro was riding a hunch. And I've known a hunch to bring all kinds of good luck. I'd like to go across myself, but I'm no jungle expert. Rod, let them give it a try."

To the captain's grudging nod, Pedro smiled. "The sun sinks fast and I have hunger. Let us eat."

Night was at hand. Some of the Mayorunas had slipped away into the bush seeking whatever food might be obtainable without straying too far. Now they were returning with a few small birds and one monkey, and McKay opened their own meager larder. When the last meal of the day had been completed, rations were reduced almost to the vanishing point.

"Rod, we'll have our work cut out standing guard tonight," said Knowlton. "I wouldn't put it past that lying old Umanuh to try to wipe us out before morning."

"Nor I," concurred McKay. "Only question is whether he dares take a chance against our guns and against the likelihood that Monitaya will send other men to investigate our disappearance. Better keep well out of sight.

The last light of day was vanishing. Stars and a quarter moon leaped into the swiftly darkening sky. The small fire of the expedition threw dim shadows against the poles of the night shelters. Lights glimmered in the Red Bone huts, but at the point where the Red Bone night guard lurked no light shone. They had built no fire, and now they were almost invisible in the faint moonlight -- sinister shadows.

Lourenco lounged over to Tucu, who was watching those shadows with a fixed cat stare, and informed him that a man with a gun would be always on guard until morning while the rest slept. The Indian grunted approval. By way of precaution, the Brazilian added that later he and his comrade would leave the

camp for a time. Tucu's eyes dwelt on his, veered to the lights of the town, and returned. In them was a plain, though unspoken, question. The bushman ignored it and returned to his tambo.

The moon sailed higher. The animal uproar of early night began to diminish. The fire smoldered dull red. In the Mayoruna shelter all was dark and silent, each man sleeping lightly with one hand on a weapon. The two Brazilians were out of sight in their hut. Up and down, barely distinguishable, Knowlton passed slowly with rifle cocked, eyes turning periodically to the Red Bone outpost and ears alert for the slightest unusual sound.

Gradually the small lights of the town faded out. To all appearance, sleep had whelmed it for the night. The only moving things were the khaki-clad sentinel and the blazing fireflies.

Another hour rolled slowly by. The sentinel stopped at a corner of the tambo. Now was as good a time as any for the Brazilians to start their perilous reconnaissance. Perhaps they had gone to sleep. He squinted at their hammocks. They were occupied. Stepping softly to the hammock of Pedro, he lifted the net to whisper to the occupant. Then he stared, dropped the net, and lifted Lourenco's curtain. A soft, self-derisive chuckle sounded in his throat as he stole out again.

The hammocks were occupied, but only by packs and rifles. He did not even know when or which way they had gone. The two men had slipped away right under his nose. Wherefore he became all the more alert. Instead of resuming his slow pace, he stood quiet at a corner, scrutinizing everything within his range of vision, listening more intently than ever. Two or three times he leaned forward at some splashing noise in the creek, but each time the guards on the other bank also sprang to see what caused the sound, then grunted to one another, so he knew it was made by piscatory or reptilian life. Near him nothing moved. And the moon sailed on westward, measuring off silent hours.

Then all at once every nerve in him strained toward the back of the tambo. Something was there! He had not heard it -- seen it -- smelled it -- but he felt it; a nameless thing that did not belong there. He pivoted, looked, listened. Nothing there.

Motionless, feeling slightly creepy, concealed under the roof corner, he waited. A sound came -- a stealthy sound. Something was creeping in. Lourenco and Pedro, perhaps? Stooping low, he peered along the ground under the hammocks. A man was coming -- coming on all fours like an animal. He was too stealthy to be either of the Brazilians. Knowlton glimpsed him only dimly, but he was sure this was no man who belonged here. And he acted without delay. In three jumps he was on the invader. His gun butt

crashed on the rising head. The other collapsed on the ground.

Swiftly Knowlton snapped a match with his nail. The sudden flare half blinded him, but what he saw made him suck in his breath. Dark haired, dark bearded, streaked with red dye and bleeding slightly at the nose, at his feet lay the man for whom the trio had traveled thousands of miles and dared all the deaths of the jungle -- the Raposa.

## XXI. - SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT

"Rod! Wake up!"

The tense whisper aroused McKay instantly. With a sweep of the arm his net was torn aside and he leaped out.

"We've got him, Rod! Look!"

Knowlton now played a flashlight on the still face. The astounded captain looked for a long minute as if in a trance.

"Whew!" he breathed. "Have you killed him?"

"Nope -- don't think so. Lord! I hope not! Now that I think of it, I did give him a solid smash with the butt. He was crawling in here, and I didn't stop to ask for his card. Feel his head."

McKay's exploring fingers found only a huge bump under the thick hair. "No, his skull's whole. Didn't even split the scalp. Unless he's got concussion he's still useful. Nosebleed from hitting the ground, I think. Turn off the light. Still on guard?"

"Yes. The Brazilians are out."

"Take a turn and see that all's clear. Can't tell what might break out any minute now. Leave your flash here."

Slight as the disturbance had been, uneasiness was in the air. The savages on the far shore were peering at the tambo and muttering. Measuring the distance, Knowlton saw that, while they probably saw the rays of the flashlight, they could not have discerned what lay on the ground. Nearer at hand, Tucu and a couple of Mayorunas were awake and looking out. But the sight of the sentinel strolling up and down in unconcern gradually quieted suspicions on both sides of the water. Soon the Red Bones squatted again and the Mayorunas lay back with minds at ease.

Then a dim sheen of light showed at the back of the American's shelter, fading out after a few minutes. McKay had pulled a blanket over himself and the unconscious man, masking the light while he studied the face and form of the invader. After the faint radiance vanished certain sounds came to the sentry's ears. McKay's figure loomed tall in the vague moonshine.

"It's Rand," the captain vouchsafed in an undertone. "No question of it. Face is drawn, though features are identical.

White hair mark, broken nose, green eyes. I opened one eye. Got a bad foot, partly healed; looks as if he'd torn it on a stub. Poor devil seems nearly starved.

"So? Then that's why he sneaked in -- wanted to steal some food. Those mutts probably haven't fed him since he got hurt."

"That's it. He's had to do his own foraging, and his foot has given him mighty little chance. Damn the brutes!"

"But now what? Look out that he doesn't sneak away again."

"He won't. I tied his feet. He's in Pedro's hammock, still dead to the world. If he wakes up and starts to yell I'll gag him. We've got to get away now as soon as we can."

"How?"

"Don't know. By water, perhaps. Wish those bushmen were here. Haven't heard any noise over there, have you?"

"All quiet. They're safe -- or dead."

"Hm! Confounded foolishness, anyway. What time is it?"

"Ten-thirty. You go on watch at midnight."

"If they don't show in the next couple of hours I'll send Tucu to find out why. We'll have to get those canoes over here."

McKay turned back to the hut. To obtain those canoes was a man-sized job. To put the Red Bone guards out of action without arousing the tribe was an even bigger job.

Another half-hour crept past. Still no noise from the town. Then from the tambo itself came a low mumble. Knowlton stepped into it. Noiselessly as they had gone, the bushmen had returned.

In his usual concise phrases McKay informed them of the capture of the Raposa.

"Now that we have him, we must get out of here. Only chance to do that is to get the canoes. We can be away from here by sunrise, and it will take the Red Bones just so much longer to find our trail where we take to the bush. Anything else to suggest?"

"That is best, Capitao," Lourenco agreed, his voice holding a note of suppressed excitement. "I believe this creek connects with that which flows past the Monitaya malocas, so we may not have to take to our legs at all. We have learned some things. Por Deus! If only we had known the Raposa was here!"

"Why?"

"Because then we could have brought company with us. Senhores, the barred house holds women of the Mayorunas! Girls stolen from Monitaya and other settlements!

"These foul Red Bones are the men who have been lurking around the tribal houses capturing girls. They have taken the prisoners to the water, where the trails always were lost and where they could find hiding places until night, then get out of the

country. So there must be a stream by which they travel. If we go downstream we are almost sure to find it by daylight."

"But what's the idea of their stealing the girls?"

"Did not Umanuh ask if we would pay more than the other Blackbeard for the Raposa? What other Blackbeard?"

"Schwandorf!" the Americans blurted, simultaneously.

"Not so loud! Schwandorf, of course! Umanuh works with him. The girls are sold to the German to add to his slave gangs. While the Mayorunas blame Peruvians for the disappearances, Umanuh works unsuspected. He holds these women until Schwandorf comes -- and it may be that Schwandorf is not far off. Now that we have come seeking the wild man, Umanuh wonders whether we or Schwandorf will pay the more for him."

"I believe you're right!" knowlton agreed. "He's stalling until Schwandorf comes up. No wonder he's wary of the Mayorunas -- they thought they were caught red-handed. You fellows did a good job to find this out without being caught."

"Lourenco worked a small hole between two logs at the back while I watched the guards, and he whispered with one of the women inside. Had we known the wild man was here we could have tried to bring back the captives. All we could do was to tell them that friends were here."

Knowlton spoke grimly: "We have our hands full this night. It won't do to leave them here while we go back to Monitaya for his army. By the time we could come back they'd be gone -- one way or another. What's done has to be done now or never."

"Right!" McKay commended. "Question is -- what?"

Lourenco answered at once. "My idea, Capitao, is this: We two will return. With us we will take Tucu. We can handle those guards quietly. We must have Tucu to assure the women, and once we are clear of the houses Tucu can lead them to the bank above here, and we shall try for the canoes."

"You are taking all the risks! Can't you take more men?"

"No. No man but Tucu. He has a cool head. The others would go blood-mad and attack the Red Bones. Now I will talk to Tucu."

He slipped into the shelter and returned with the Mayoruna leader, whom he led to the far side of the tambo. Then, in whispers which the other tribesmen could not overhear, he explained the situation. Knowlton took another turn along his post. As he stopped again at the corner near the whispering pair he heard Tucu grinding his teeth. But he spoke no word as he slipped away.

"He will wake another and tell him what to do," Lourenco explained. "But only we four shall know of the women until they are freed. Will one of you lend Tucu a machete? He may need a

weapon, and he cannot carry his big bow on this trip."

A few minutes later the three crept out, Tucu gripping McKay's machete. As a final word Lourenco said: "Our men here may move about a little after a time, but do not try to keep them quiet. It is a part of the plan."

With that he was gone. McKay took up his rifle and assumed the sentry work. Knowlton sat in his hammock grateful for the chance to rest weary legs. No sound came from the Raposa.

"Lord! I sure knocked him cold!" was the lieutenant's thought. "But he's still with us, and there's no use in reviving him; the less noise the better. Poor devil! A millionaire, yet half starved and more than half nutty."

The moon had journeyed so far westward that the creeping shadows of the tall trees had moved out almost to the creek, and the two crude shelters and the sentinel were surrounded by dense gloom. The Red Bone men must rely on their ears alone hereafter. McKay was visible to his own party, but not to the enemy.

Knowlton yawned, squinted into the moonlight, and then arose. Working very quietly, he took down three of the hammocks, rolled them up, laid them at the corner nearest the creek; made up the packs by sense of touch and placed them and the rifles of the absent pair in the same place. Then he lifted the Raposa and laid him on the packs, with a rolled hammock under his head. If given time when the crisis came, he meant to save all equipment. If not, Rand lay where he could be moved quickly.

Before he had finished he was aware that the Mayorunas all were awake and moving stealthily about. McKay stepped into the hut, where Knowlton told him what he had done. So softly had the men of Monitaya moved that the Red Bones showed no sign of alarm. Both the Americans observed, however, that the cannibals across the stream had their heads together and that occasionally one looked up at the little moon.

"Get that, Rod? They're waiting for the shadows to cover them and the water. They know that then we can't see what they are up to. I'm betting they intend some dirty work after that."

"You're right. Wonder what these Mayorunas are fixing to do. Wish I could talk their language."

The shadow line passed out upon the water, slipping by infinitesimal gradations across its mirror surface. The Mayorunas had become quiet. Far out in the forest a jaguar gave a coughing roar. Little by little the Red Bone men arose from their squat until they stood erect. A tense stillness held both forces. And the shadows crawled on -- on -- and reached the farther bank.

Then a Red Bone put his head forward, squinting upstream as

if he had heard something move. He began to sneak softly in that direction. At that moment, from the water's edge a little above the camp, sounded a loud hiss.

Before the sound died a sudden thrum of bow cords filled the air. A whisper of five-foot shafts speeding over the water -- a rapid-fire series of tiny impacts -- a couple of short groans -- the thumps of falling bodies -- and the Red Bone outpost was no more. Pierced by the deadly war arrows of the Mayorunas, they were dead before they struck the ground. And from the Mayorunas sounded one short, subdued "Hah!" of savage satisfaction.

A tall figure arose from the ground waving its arms. Then it ran for the canoes. Out from the gloom upstream other figures took shape, running fast for the same point. With one movement, the Raposa was seized and rushed to the stream.

"Senhores! Be ready!" sounded Pedro's low voice.

"Ready and waiting!" snapped McKay. "Who are those people? Your women?"

"Si. We are not discovered -- "

Across his words smote a long shrill yell from the town.

"Por Deus. They know! Get our rifles."

He leaped into a canoe, drove it headlong across, and dived for the tambo. Behind him others dashed panting to the landing. Tucu's voice rasped in swift commands. The fugitives swarmed into other dugouts. The Mayoruna men, still ignorant of the identity of these people, but assured by Tucu that they were not enemies, lowered their weapons and rushed for the water. In the town the yelling grew and figures came pelting toward the creek.

The canoes struck the bank. Some were partly filled, some empty and in tow. The Raposa was bundled into Pedro's canoe, while the Mayorunas got into anything within reach. Lourenco appeared and urged the Americans to open fire. As he spoke, arrows thudded into the ground and the water.

"Take this man and go!" rasped McKay. "We're losing our equipment, but -- "

His rifle leaped to his shoulder. Flame spat from it, and from the van of the charging Red Bones shrilled a death scream. Again and again the captain's gun cracked. Knowlton's joined in. Before their rifles grew silent the blunt roar of Pedro's repeater broke out. And when the long guns were empty the Americans drew their short ones. In a concerted ripping crash they volleyed death and dismay into the oncoming cannibals.

The rush was checked. The Red Bones wavered and into their mass poured a cloud of arrows and blowgun darts from the silent weapons of the Mayorunas. As the others paused to reload,

Lourenco worked madly and alone to save the equipment. And thanks to the renewed deadly fire, he succeeded.

The Red Bones gave back more and more. Their arrows fell harmlessly for their foes were virtually invisible in the deep shadows. Downstream, Tucu's harsh voice boomed commands, and then Lourenco panted: "In comrades! We are loaded. In!"

The riflemen obeyed without a word, and with a powerful heave Lourenco sent the canoe after the others. Hunched among the packs, all went sliding down a jungle Styx.

A moment later the Red Bones, with the cessation of firing, poured an avalanche of arrows into the spot where they had been. And as the canoe, last in the escaping line, was swallowed up in the impenetrable blackness a screech of diabolical fury blended with a succession of splashes where the cannibals plunged headlong into the stream to reach the dead or wounded men whom they vainly hoped to find on the farther shore.

## XXII. - THE SIREN OF WAR

Like a fleet manned by sightless sailors the line of boats blundered on through the blackness. Without light, the canoes bumped the banks and collided with one another in confusion. Speed was impossible, yet speed was imperative. Knowlton's little flashlight solved the problem.

"Let's take the lead," he suggested. "This little light isn't much, but it's something. We can see a little way ahead, and pass the word back to the rest."

"That little white eye in your box may save us all," said Pedro. "Lourenco, tell those ahead to let us pass."

The preceding dugouts swerved, and the boat of the Americans slipped by. At the head of the line they found Tucu struggling to make progress without wrecking the whole fleet at the turns. Relief and instant acceptance followed Lourenco's explanation. The floating column began to pick up speed.

And it was well that it did. Howls of baffled hate came faintly from the Red Bone town. Some time later more yells sounded, much nearer -- at a place on the creek where the last boat had cleared only a few minutes previously. Umanuh's men had made torches and run along one of the trails to a bend in the stream, only to find the water bare of everything but dying ripples.

Whether the enemy attempted to follow in canoes was never known to the escaping party. The narrow margin gained by the aid of the flashlight had been enough to provide a commanding lead, and the only obstacles they faced were those of winding waters.

Hour after hour Knowlton squatted in the extreme bow, picking out the turns and snags ahead and passing the word back to Lourenco, who steered in accordance. Amidships Pedro and McKay plied steady paddles and the Raposa lay all but forgotten. There were no halts. If any boat behind got into difficulties it extricated itself as best it could, unaided, and fell into a new place.

At last there came a wan light, which was scarcely a light at all, but rather a lessening of the density. Slowly the nearest tree trunks began to shape, and presently the shore line became visible. At the same time Knowlton's light dimmed and faded out.

"Another battery gone," he announced. "I'm all in! Eyes feel like a couple of burnt holes. Well, gents, I move that at the first available spot we go ashore and feed our faces."

"Motion carried." McKay's set face relaxed. Then, his glance dropping to the Raposa, and it tightened again. "Oh, hullo, Rand! How you feeling?"

Rand was unconscious no longer. And his expression was not that of one emerging from a stupor. Though he made no move to change his position, his eyes indicated that he had been awake for some time. They dwelt steadily on McKay, then strayed past to Pedro, Lourenco, and the first Mayoruna crew following a few feet behind. His face was inscrutable, and he spoke no word.

"You're with friends. Understand? Friends. You're going home. These Indians are friends, too. Get that? Friends!"

The green eyes hung on McKay's face again; but, as before, no answer came in word, movement, or expression.

"No good, Rod," said Knowlton. "Afraid I knocked his last brains down his throat."

"I don't know about that. He doesn't look vacant. See here, Rand. We're going to land and eat. You hungry? Uh-huh. Thought you'd understand that. He's alive, Merry. Maybe not all here, but enough to get us."

"Good! Say, how about landing at that little open space on the left, Lourenco?"

"Very good. It looks dry, Senhor."

The canoe swerved to a spot on the shore where light poured down from an opening in the overhead wall of foliage.

"Look here, Rand," warned the captain. "We'll untie you. But if you try to duck into the bush, now or later, you get shot. Shot! Understand?"

For the first time Rand responded -- a slow, short nod. McKay cut the cord around the wild man's ankles, then stepped ashore and held out a hand. Rand arose quietly, jumped to the earth unassisted, lifted his bad foot and stared at it, then limped

into a warm spot in the sun and sat down to bask.

"Have to fix that foot," yawned Knowlton. "But my eyes are one solid ache, and I'm going to rest them. Watch him, will you, Rod? Can't tell what he might do."

He bathed his eyes, then lay down in the canoe with a wet handkerchief across them. Pedro and Lourenco already were ashore and raiding the slender packs for food. The Mayorunas were debarking and watching each new boat, their eyes on the women who had wielded paddles with them but whose faces they now saw closely for the first time. In the shaft of sunlight McKay stood tall and forbidding, rifle in the crook of one arm, hat pulled low, guarding the gaunt man at his feet.

The women, all young, numbered eleven. Their skin was pallid, their eyes too big and black, their faces drawn -- the results of confinement and anxiety; but none showed any sign of abuse. For commercial reasons, Umanuh had seen to it that the women he held for sale should remain uninjured. Now, saved from the slave trail or worse, the girls showed no more emotion than if on a mere journey after turtles or fish.

When all were ashore, a dozen of the men went into the jungle to hunt. The others sought wood, inspected weapons, talked with the girls, who stared at McKay. A number of the warriors looked sourly at Rand whose face still bore the Red Bone tribal streaks. Their mental reaction to the sight of the red cross on the forehead and the straight cheek lines was rabidly hostile. McKay decided to wash Rand's face before journeying much farther. But Rand himself gave no sign that he either knew or cared.

Then one of the women pointed at him and said something to Tucu. Somewhat to McKay's surprise, Tucu and a couple of other men now gave Rand a more friendly look. Soon afterward Tucu passed Lourenco, who talked with him a few minutes, and the news was relayed.

"Tucu says, Capitao, that one of the girls says this man, the Raposa, tried to release them a short time ago and was nearly killed by the Red Bones for it. They let him live only because he is crazy, and they fear to kill a crazy man."

"What! He tried to get them clear?"

"Yes. He opened the door and motioned for them to run, but before they could escape they were caught."

"Hm! Crazy and wild, but a man for all that. How did you manage to free the women?"

"Very simple," came the answer. "We stabbed the guards, opened the door, and came back to the creek with the women."

"Just like that, eh?"

The bushman grinned. "What do you desire for breakfast -- salt fish and coffee, or coffee and salt fish?"

"A little of both. Here comes some monkey meat, too."

The first hunters had returned, bringing two big red howlers. Others drifted in at intervals, and not one returned empty handed; for here game was plentiful. Soon the air was heavy with the odor of broiling meat, and the fragrance of coffee was wafted to the nostrils of the recumbent Knowlton, who arose swallowing.

Rand, famished though he was, gave no sign of assent or of hunger. In fact, he gave no sign of anything.

"The man's got pride!" thought Knowlton. "Almost ready to keel over from lack of food, but stiff as a cigarstore Indian."

Tucu approached, carrying two big monkey haunches. One he offered to McKay, the other to Rand. The latter's immobility vanished. With a lightning grab he seized the meat and sank his teeth in it. As he wolfed down the tough flesh the three men exchanged glances. Tucu laid a hand on his stomach and pressed inward, signifying that the man had long gone hungry. The others nodded. Then they split the other haunch and fell to gnawing.

Lourenco, bringing coffee to the captain, asked Tucu in what direction the Monitaya houses lay. Without hesitation the Indian pointed off to the left. The Brazilian glanced at the creek, estimating its direction and rate of flow, then returned to his fire.

Offered coffee, Rand took it and sipped it with evident relish. Likewise he accepted a cigarette, which he puffed like a man just learning to smoke. For his meat, his drink, and his smoke he gave no indication of gratitude. His attitude was as indifferent and matter-of-fact as if he were one of the Mayorunas. When his smoke was ended he began inspecting his bad foot.

"Let's see that," said Knowlton, dropping on one knee. "Pretty mean looking; yes, it's infected."

He went to the canoe, returned with his meager medical kit, and knelt again. "Listen, Rand. I don't know how well you understand me, but I'm taking the chance. This foot has to be opened up and cleaned out. I'm going to hurt you. If you raise a row you'll get an anaesthetic -- a swift punch under the ear. Better sit still and make no fuss."

With which he went to work. He did a thorough job, and there was no doubt that it hurt. But Rand gave no trouble, nor even a sign of pain -- except that he dug his fingers into the dirt.

"You're a Spartan," approved Knowlton. "Before we move on, go wash your face good and hard. Get that tribe paint off. These Indians with us don't like it. Understand? Wash the paint!"

Rand got up slowly, limped to the water's edge, and began to

scrub his face. When he desisted the marks still showed, for the red dye clung stubbornly; but they were fainter than before. The other men eyed him thoughtfully, none speaking. He settled in his former place, curled up, and began to doze.

"A queer fish!" Pedro said softly. "Is he crazy or not?"

"Hanged if I know," replied McKay. "He's no maniac, anyhow. Merry, your eyes need rest. You curl up in the bow and snooze one hour. Then another man, and so on. And how about letting Tucu lead the parade again?"

"Excellent, Capitao! I was thinking of that." Lourenco talked to Tucu, who swung out into the current. At a steady cruising speed the brigade surged on downstream.

In two hours Tucu's canoe slowed and floated in to the left bank. The others backed water and looked at a narrow ravine -- a cleft in a rising hillside. Through it led a lane of water.

"This is the connection we have been seeking," Lourenco explained. "The women say their captors came by this crack in the hill. At the end we shall find the creek of Monitaya."

After threading their way along a weedy water-path barely wide enough to give passage, they emerged at a slant into another stream. Down this, with sure instinct, Tucu turned his prow. Once more on the waters of their home creek, the Mayorunas quickened their strokes merrily on the way to their malocas.

Lourenco napped and resumed his place. Hour after hour the fleet sped on. Noon passed without a halt, the paddlers munching at whatever remained from breakfast.

By four o'clock even the Mayorunas began to lag in their strokes. Excluding the halt at sunrise, they now had been journeying for fifteen hours, in the last nine of which they had covered many miles of serpentine water. The heat of the day and the constant drive had taken their toll. McKay, recognizing the signs of exhaustion, realized that without some powerful spur the Indians would not attempt to reach the malocas until the morrow.

Then the spur came. Every Mayoruna suddenly ceased paddling and threw up his head. Faint and far, a xylophonic call of beaten wooden bars rapped across the jungle, rising and falling in swift, regular cadence -- a sirenical flow and ebb of sound waves. Over and over it undulated, rapid, incessant, imperative.

A chorus of excited grunts broke from the canoe brigade. The dugout of Tucu leaped away like a roweled horse. Lourenco and Pedro buried their paddles in mighty strokes, hurling their boat ahead to keep from being run down by those behind.

Lourenco barked at Tucu, who flung back an answer.

"Paddle hard, Capitao! If we do not keep up we shall be

wrecked. That message is the war call of the Mayorunas -- calling in the hunters from the forest to take arms against an enemy. We must race now with these madmen around us, or we go under. Paddle!"

## XXIII - STRATEGY

In the last light of the fast-fading day the canoes darted from the forest into the clearing of Monitaya. Long before their arrival the siren call had ceased, but there had been no lessening of speed by the racing dugouts. Now, as the panting crews emerged from the jungle, they found themselves flanked by a long line of fellow-warriors, bristling with drawn arrows and ready spear points. But of the enemy there was no sign.

At sight of the familiar faces the tense Monitayans let their weapons slowly sink. And when Tucu gaspingly demanded news the line dissolved into a mob of welcome. In the first few breaths it was learned that no fight had yet taken place, but that all the warriors had been brought in and ordered to prepare to march at the next sunrise; and that the sudden war call had been sent out as the result of the arrival of a stranger.

Then the crowd parted, and through it came two men whose appearance caused the Americans to erupt into shouts of greeting. One, whose hard face swiftly relaxed into a smile of relief, was the chief himself. The other, whose jutting jaw suddenly dropped was Tim -- Tim, strong, florid, and aggressive, astounded at the sight of his cromades standing there alive.

Dropping his gun, he gave a roar of welcome. He wrung their hands, pounded their shoulders, laughed, swore, all at once.

"You're alive!" he burst out. "We thought you were wiped out sure! We were set to start in the morning and pull the Red Bones to pieces. How'd you break through? Did you kill Schwandorf and his gang?"

"Schwandorf? Gang? Haven't seen anybody but Red Bones," replied Knowlton. "What are you talking about?"

"You can't have missed him by much. He must be there by now. Who are the girls, and who is this? Is he the Raposa?"

"Tim!" broke in McKay. "What's all this about? This is the Raposa. These girls are Mayorunas who were held prisoners by the Red Bones. Now open up with yours news."

"Right, Cap. We had a visitor today -- Hozy Martinez, the one man in that crew we had. He's all painted up like an Indian, head shaved an all. Says Schwandorf and a whole gang are back here to get this Raposa and all the girls they can lay hands on. He says Schwandorf has the Red Bones working for him.

"Good thing I was here or he'd be in the stewpot. Monitaya's a good skate, but he's poison to anything Peruvian. I got him to cool down and he believes Hozy's telling the truth, but even at that they've got Hozy tied up."

In the meantime, Tucu and Lourenco were relating the tale of what had taken place to the chief; for he had demanded immediate and full details. By that time the keen hunger of the voyagers had grown ravenous. Closely followed by all, Monitaya stalked into the tribal house and commanded that food be brought.

Directly in front of the chief's hammock sat a gaunt, painted Indian around whose neck was a stout noose, the other end being held by a muscular savage. As the Americans reached him the noosed man's face cracked in a grin.

"Greetings, senores," said the voice of Jose. "You will pardon me for remaining seated?

"Jose!" exclaimed both Knowlton and McKay. The sight angered them and they turned to Lourenco.

"Tell Monitaya to free this man," McKay snapped. At his peremptory tone the chieftain looked oddly at him, and when Lourenco translated -- though in a more diplomatic manner -- he scowled. But the rope was lifted from the prisoner's neck.

"Gracias, amigos," he bowed. "If I remain seated it is because I am weary -- and I have not eaten since yesterday."

Naked, painted, minus his mustache and flamboyant headkerchief, he appeared a far different man than the domineering puntero. But his bold black eyes, his reckless grin, and his mocking tone proved him the same swashbuckling Jose.

"Well, you're going to eat now!" vowed Knowlton. "Is this the way to treat a man who brings a warning at risk of his life?"

Jose shrugged. "Once an enemy, always an enemy. That is their rule. Thank you, senor; I will eat now and talk later."

Deftly he extracted a chunk of meat from a clay pot which had been placed before Knowlton and in turn tendered to him. Monitaya watched with no sign of disapproval, and the Americans made an aggressive show of friendship for the chief's benefit. They knew that the rescue of the Mayoruna women had made their position virtually impregnable, and that their recognition of Jose as a friend probably would be his only bulwark.

Monitaya, sitting in regal dignity, fastened his eyes on Rand, the strange combination of civilization, Indian, and jungle demon of whom he had heard so much and on whose tanned skin the red skeleton streaks told the tale of a "mind out of the skull." Jose and Tim stared in frank curiosity at the dead-alive newcomer, whose silent composure remained totally unperturbed.

When the meal was finished Monitaya commanded the rescued girls to stand before him and narrate their experiences. The men lit smokes, Jose seizing the proffered cigarette with avidity, Rand accepting his with the usual odd deliberation.

"Well, Hozy, you're in with the chief now," asserted Tim. "This fellow Renzo can talk cannibal so well he makes Monitaya hunt for the dictionary, and he'll tell the chief in ten seconds what I tried half an hour to say this afternoon -- that you belong."

"Without your argument, Senor Tim, I should now be dead. I can speak the Mayoruna tongue quite well, but of what use is it when men will not listen? It was you and your gun that saved me."

"Gun? Did you pull a gun on Monitaya?" ejaculated Knowlton.

"Aw, no. That is -- I guess maybe I did wave it around while I was arguing -- I can always convince someone better if I have something in my hand. But I didn't act real rough."

"You are lucky to be still alive, Senhor Tim," said Lourenco. "If Monitaya were not the man he is you would not be alive."

"Jose," broke in McKay, "let's hear your story. I thought you were going to put Schwandorf out of action for good?"

"And I am, Capitan! That is why I now am here. If I had reached him immediately it would have been done at once. But a man travels slowly when he has lost much blood, and before I met Schwandorf again I had time to think coolly. Then when I saw him I changed my plans.

"Some days down the river I met him traveling fast in a canoe paddled by hard men whom I know. He pretended to be greatly grieved when I told him you all were dead. I said we were attacked by Indians and that I alone escaped. Then he said something that made me decide not to kill him for a time.

"He told me he had learned that this man, Rand, was a bank thief who had run away from North America, and that a reward would be paid for him. He said that you were detectives trying to earn the reward. That is false, is it not, senores?"

"We're no detectives. Rand's no thief."

"Ah, so I thought. But Schwandorf often tells truth to conceal his lies, so that it is sometimes hard to know which is ture and which untrue. He said that since you were dead we might get the money for ourselves. If we succeeded in catching Rand and taking him out alive I should get half the reward.

"I saw plainly what his plan was. I might be useful to him in catching Rand, since I am a far better bushman than he. But whether I got Rand or not, I never should live to demand my part of the money. When the right time should come, Jose would meet with a fatal accident. But I did not let him know I saw this. I

pretended to fall in with his plan like the fool he thought me to be.

"It was not Rand alone that brought him here. You have brought back Mayoruna women so you know the Red Bones are women stealers. And they steal for Schwandorf. You may believe me or not, senores, but I did not know this until the German told me. As soon as I learned it I saw how I could destroy Schwandorf, and at the same time try to save you.

"When we reached the right place, I deserted the German, shaved, painted myself with red and black plant dyes, and came to this place. But since you had already gone, I could only try to tell this chief the Red Bones were stealers of his women and that the German was with them. If Senor Tim had not befriended me I should have died too soon to tell my tale. That is all."

"How many men has Schwandorf?" asked McKay.

"About twenty in all, Capitan. There were eight in his crew, and they were to meet a dozen more."

"All riflemen?"

"Si. He brought many cartridges for them. They are to raid the tribe houses of these people."

The Americans looked thoughtfully around the big house. The strong but cruel faces of the Mayoruna warriors were stamped with malignant hatred for the Red Bones and the Blackbeard who enslaved their women. The command to prepare for a march at dawn had not been withdrawn.

"We'll be expected to go, too, and I'd sure like another crack at Umanuh, not to mention Schwandorf," said Knowlton. "But we have Rand now, and our first duty is to get him out."

His friends and the Brazilians frowned. Every man of them itched to close with the enemy in one final decisive battle. Yet --

"What'll we do with Rand?" Knowlton voiced.

The green eyes of the Raposa turned, rested on his, and traveled deliberately along the other faces. And then, to the astonishment of all, he spoke: "I'll fight," said Rand.

Speechless, the men around him stared. His face was inscrutable as ever, his eyes fathomless, his voice flat and toneless. But slowly he raised his hands as if holding a bow; twitched his right thumb and forefinger in the motion of loosing a shaft; let the hands sink. Not another word did he speak.

"There's the answer!" triumphed Tim. "He says, 'Fight!' "

"I think that the man has settled the matter for us," Pedro seconded. "None of us wants to run away, and we should be considered cowards, worse than dogs, if we refused to fight."

McKay nodded, still studying the expressionless Rand.

"That's settled," he announced, crisply. "Now, Lourenco,

find out Monitaya's plan of battle."

The chief had finished his examination of the women, and Lourenco promptly questioned him. Monitaya laconically replied.

"His purpose is not changed by our arrival. He goes tomorrow to attack and destroy the Red Bones. They will surround the town and when the chief gives his yell all will rush upon it."

"About what I expected. His strategy is rotten. Might be good enough if he had only Umanuh to deal with, but with Schwandorf it's different. Ask him how he expects to protect his women while he's gone."

"He says," Lourenco reported, "that there will be no danger to the women, because his warriors will be between the women and their enemies until those enemies are dead."

"Too simple. He doesn't realize that a man like Schwandorf is bound to outguess him and isn't at all likely to play into his hands. It's up to him to outguess the German. We'll do his guessing for him.

"Schwandorf goes into Umanuh's town, learns what's happened and finds the Red Bones frothing. He figures that we've returned here with the women, that Monitaya's men are blood-mad, and that they'll do just what they are planning to do -- march on Red Bone town and leave their women unprotected. He is in this country to get girls, and with Monitaya's men away he has a wide-open chance to make the biggest slave haul of his life. So he plans to attack this place, capture all the young women, and allow the Red Bones to massacre everyone else and burn the houses. After that perhaps he intends to find us and get Rand, or perhaps to attack other Mayoruna malocas. At any rate, his first objective is this place. Am I right so far?"

"Dead right," Knowlton nodded.

"Very well. Now he may figure that the Mayorunas will come against Umanuh by canoe or by overland. In either case, the Red Bones have to come through the bush, for the simple reason that they haven't boats enough to carry all their force. Chances are that they'll march overland by some route that would dodge the Mayoruna line of march. But in either case they're coming here. And it's here, in the place where he's not expected to be, that Monitaya should meet them. Let him fortify himself and await the assault. It will come."

"And we shall be saved many weary miles of leg work," Jose smiled. "Capitan, your strategy is magnificent."

Lourenco very carefully explained it all to Monitaya, dwelling on the fact that McKay himself was a warrior chieftain and familiar with the fighting methods of such men as the atrocious

Blackbeard, and depicting graphically the horror of an attack on the defenseless women. It took him some time to divert the chief from his original plan, but in the end he succeeded.

To the astonishment and disappointment of the warriors, Monitaya curtly announced that the march would not take place. They stared as if disbelieving, but not a man questioned the new orders. The chief had spoken, and his word was final.

Reluctantly they laid aside the weapons. The chief watched them with a little smile of pride -- pride in their zest for war, pride in their unquestioning acceptance of his order. Then he coolly told them to continue their work; told them, further, that the next morning all the streams were to be poisoned, new traps set, and scouts stationed far out on every trail. Instantly their faces flamed again. They were to fight, after all!

## XXIV. - THE BATTLE OF THE TRIBES

The next four days were busy enough to satisfy the most impatient Mayoruna warrior. Outposts were established on every route by which the attackers might approach, the watchmen being given commands to run at top speed with the warning. Those detailed to the work of polluting streams gathered blue-blossomed plants with yellow roots, the roots being pulped and thrown into the slow currents. The wurali squad procured their materials and prepared a plentiful supply of the venomed brew.

New traps were set at points where a man might be picked off. And inside the big houses men skilled in the manufacture of arrows and darts toiled for long hours.

These activities, however, were only the usual defense preparations. It remained for the newcomers to devise additional features, simple in themselves, but astounding to savages accustomed only to primitive battle tactics. After a survey of the terrain and a catechism of Lourenco and Monitaya as to the usual methods of attack and defense, the Americans presented an idea taylored to the situation. The chief was slow to approve it, for it involved a literal undermining of his fortress. But he was an unusually intelligent savage, and eventually the advantages of it won him first to assent and then to enthusiasm. The amazed warriors were set to work, armed with crude wooden shovels, in digging holes under the logs that were their shelter.

All along the walls the tunnels were marked at intervals. Another large gang excavated before each maloca a deep, curving trench, the pits separated by a ten-foot space of solid earth affording the passage from the houses to the creek. In the

meantime, flimsy covers were woven from withes and vines. As soon as a tunnel was completed it was masked by one of these covers on which a thin layer of earth and grass was laid. The two trenches were concealed, and the loose earth was carried inside the house and packed solidly against the walls flanking the doors.

At sundown of the fourth day the work was ended. When the chief and his allies went on a final inspection tour they could find no sign that the houses were honeycombed with exits or that the ground in front of the little entrances was not solid.

"Holes are covered to look exactly like the ground," Knowlton explained. "Every man of us has to be inside when the enemy arrives, but we have to get out quick at the right time, so we go under the walls. And the Red Bones go into the trenches!"

Whereat Lourenco and Jose smiled. They knew something that the Americans did not -- that Monitaya had improved the trap by studding the bottom with barbed bones smeared in wurali.

When the fifth day broke no man showed himself outside the walls. Except the few outposts, every male awaited with growing tension the arrival of the enemy. It was more than likely that Schwandorf's force would be preceded by scouts, and possibly one or more of these would slip by the outguards and spy on the tribal houses. The sight of even one warrior would be suspicious to such a spy, and the word would go back speedily to the Red Bones. Wherefore the only Monitayans to pass the doorways were a few women sent out as bait, and these stayed close by.

Within, the men waited at appointed places, each tunnel with its quota of warriors. The Americans had elected to fight from the maloca of the chief, while the Brazilians and Jose were to garrison the other doorway. Rand, armed with a strong bow and plenty of arrows, would remain in the chief's maloca.

One or more of the Americans was constantly on the lookout through some inconspicuous loophole. Hour after hour dragged past, and no unusual movement or sound occurred. Under the glare of the sun the roof and walls grew hot; under the silent strain of anticipation the impatience of the warriors became a ferment. Pedro, unable to keep still, mounted next to Knowlton. Scarcely had he put his eye to an opening when both men sucked in their breath. At the edge of the bush a man's head peered from behind a tree. At the same moment a single canoe came creeping out of the bush to the landing. The head behind the tree was that of a Red Bone spy. The two in the canoe were Yuara and a companion from the Suba tribe.

"Lourenco!" whispered Pedro. "Yuara comes. Tell girls to run to welcome him and guide him between the pits. A spy is

watching. If Yuara walks on the pits he dies and our trap is revealed. Send girls quickly!"

Lourenco acted instantly. Seizing two young women, he pushed them doorward, talking swiftly. Yuara was already advancing innocently toward the few girls outside. The two girls picked were of quick intelligence, and now they darted out. Before the pair could reach the trap the girls were upon them, laughing as if delighted to see a man, and deftly turned them to safety.

Astonished by this effusive welcome, the young warriors were piloted to the door and inside. As they disappeared the head of the spy also vanished. Knowlton wiped the sweat from his brow. Yuara and his companion meanwhile were being interrogated by both Lourenco and Monitaya, who in turn enlightened them. At the promise of war their faces lit up.

Yuara had come only on a visit to learn news, and with no waste of words he and his companion attached themselves to the defending force. Monitaya was informed of the arrival of the enemy scout, and word was passed among the warriors. But another hour passed, and another; and still no word.

Suddenly a chorus of screams shrilled from the women outside. In a frenzy of fear they plunged through the doorways. Blending with their outcries, a hoarse yell of ferocity rose from the direction of the creek. A louder ululation burst forth at the rear and sides of the clearing. The malocas were surrounded.

Loping from the bush fringing the stream came a score of yellow-faced, barefooted brutes crisscrossed with cartridge belts and gripping rifles. At their head loomed a black-whiskered creature -- Schwandorf -- with a revolver in each hand.

Grinning like wolves, they doubled toward the low entrances, guns spouting into the air -- a ragged volley meant only to terrorize the defenseless women within. But from the loopholes where the defending rifles lurked no shot cracked in reply.

The fiendish howling of the Red Bones swelled into a feline screech that almost drowned the roar of the rifles. Into view streamed hideous faces and naked bodies swerving from left and right to follow the Blackbeard and his gunmen.

And then with the suddenness of a cataclysm the ground opened. Riflemen vanished in midstride. Savages screaming triumphant hate were gone in the flick of an eye. Others, instinctively digging their heels into the ground, were hurled forward and down by the momentum of the following mass. Before the rush could be checked the trenches were packed with struggling men who wounded themselves and one another with the deadly points of their poisoned weapons.

Schwandorf, by blind chance, had set foot on the narrow isthmus separating the twin trenches. Now, as the Red Bones fought back from the trap, his gunmen wiped out, he stood in momentary stupefaction at the welter of death on the flanks.

Then boomed the mighty battlefield voice of McKay.

"Now! Fire at will!"

The walls spat flame and lead, and a scythe of death swept across the ground. Schwandorf, shocked into activity, dodged death by an infinitesimal fraction of a second. Hurling himself backward, he struck the earth just as the bullets sped through the air over him. With a lightning rebound he was up while fresh cartridges were pushed into rifle barrels, and headlong he dived into the mass of Red Bones just behind. The next bullets darting after him killed the savages, leaving him unharmed.

The crack of rifles sent the quivering Mayorunas into the fight. Every masking tunnel cover was hurled into the air. Before the Red Bones had recovered from the shock of seeing their leaders annihilated, they beheld a horde of vindictive foes erupting from under the walls. A chilling yell of fury smote their ears; a hastily loosed storm of arrows and spears ripped them; a swift running arc of warriors swerved around them, shooting and stabbing as they went. They who had so exultantly surrounded the malocas now were surrounded in turn.

The two Brazilians and Jose leaped forth and dashed to hold the entrance of the other big house. Firing as they ran the three bushmen struck down enemies at every shot with the swift surety of veterans. When their objective had been reached a fringe of dead foes marked their passage. Once within the door they sprayed lead along the trenches, which now had become a deadline past which no Red Bone sought to go.

In the chief's house the Americans fought steadily, shooting as coolly as if engaged in rapid-fire target practice, the silent Rand methodically driving arrows in swift succession from his wall-slit. Arrows thudded thickly into the logs masking them. Bullets from the heavy revolvers of Schwandorf slammed into their ramparts. And the German could shoot. With only the small gun muzzles as targets, he planted bullets so close as to knock dirt more than once into the eyes of the riflemen. After a time he got a bullet fair into a loophole. Knowlton grunted suddenly, swayed back, toppled, fell down the parapet.

"Are you all right?" howled Tim.

Knowlton heaved himself into a sitting position and clapped a hand to his right shoulder. He looked at the red smear, reeled up, and scrambled back to his rifle. Schwandorf's bullet had gone

cleanly through his shoulder. Without a word he got his gun into action once more, shooting now from the left shoulder.

The encircling Mayorunas, their first fury vented, now settled to their work. On all sides their clubmen and spearmen were bludgeoning and stabbing the close-packed Red Bones, leaping in, killing, springing back with terrible efficiency. Beyond a thin line of bowmen poured arrows in high-looping curves into the center of the enemy force. The blowgun men too were darting into every opening, handling their clumsy weapons like feathers and constantly moving to spy out fresh targets.

But the Mayorunas were not escaping unscathed. The Red Bones, assailed from every quarter, were fighting now in desperation. Their own clubbers and stabbers were charging out and smashing skulls or piercing abdomens, their arrows rose in all directions. With a leader and a chance to form, they might have broken through and taken a far heavier toll. But they had no leader; for Umanuh, whose name meant "corpse," now was a corpse in truth. And Schwandorf was very busy looking out for Schwandorf, so it became every man for himself.

Thicker and thicker fell the dead. The trenches were piled with a windrow of bullet-torn bodies knocked down by the spitting rifles. Jose, Pedro, and Lourenco abandoned all shelter and knelt in plain sight before the door. Monitaya, until now a field general who strode up and down roaring commands, suddenly cast away his role and, seizing a club from one of his bodyguard, hurled himself on the nearest Red Bones -- a raving, ravening demon of destructiveness whose weapon swung like the club of Hercules. His bowmen and blowgun men, out of missiles, came charging in with bare hands. Maneuvering had ended. Henceforth the fight was a grappling melee.

The gunfire dwindled. The rifle cartridges were spent.

## XXV. - THE PASSING OF SCHWANDORF

The three soldiers flung down their hot empty guns.

"I'm going out and get some fresh air," rumbled Tim. He drew pistol and machete, leaped down, and lunged through the door. McKay bounded at his heels.

"Merry! Rand! Stay here!" he commanded. Then he was outside, his pistol roaring in unison with Tim's.

Knowlton and Rand looked at each other. Knowlton fumbled his pistol into his left hand, slid down the embankment, and staggered out. Rand picked up Tim's discarded gun and followed.

Over at the other doorway the bushmen threw aside their

useless guns, drew their machetes, and leaped like jaguars at their foes. Their pistols emptied, the Americans also drew machetes -- all except Rand, who had no weapon but the bulletless rifle -- and waited. Few unwounded Red Bones now were left; but among those few Schwandorf still lived.

Schwandorf came at them. He came not because he wanted to, however, for his guns were empty. He came because the Red Bones whose forms had shielded him for so long threw him bodily. They had no time to stand and watch what might happen to him, as snarling they resumed their now hopeless battle.

For a moment the German stood glowering at McKay. Then, with a dramatic gesture, he threw aside his useless revolvers.

McKay silently passed his pistol to Tim and sheathed his machete. Fists clenched, he sprang forward. Schwandorf halted. His hands remained empty -- until the captain was within eight feet of him. Then he leaped back, machete jumping into his fist, its point stabbing for his antagonist's stomach.

An instantaneous sidestep and twist saved the captain. The blade ripped through cloth and scraped the skin. As Schwandorf yanked it back McKay struck it away and jumped at his assailant. An instant later the two blackbeards were in a death grapple.

Schwandorf strove for a back-breaking hold, but found it blocked. McKay was a formidable wrestler, and the German's weight advantage was more than offset by the American's quickness and wiry strength. Science was thrown to the winds. A heaving, choking, wrenching man-fight it was, each trying to twist and break the other and batter him down to death.

Smashing blows brought blood from their faces. Wringing grips forced gasps from lungs and superhuman spasms of resistance. They rolled on the ground, throttled, kicked, struck, and tore. Finally, in a furious outburst of energy, McKay forced his enemy down under him, and crashed a terrific punch squarely between the German's glaring eyes. Schwandorf went limp.

At that instant a backward eddy of the battle surged over the pair. Fighting to the bitter end, the Red Bones found the two under their feet. Screeching, snarling, they fell on them like wild beasts. Without arms, they fought with nature's weapons, while above them one lone clubman tried to swing his lethal bludgeon.

McKay, wrenching his machete loose, got its point upward and jabbed blindly at the weight of flesh bearing him down. To his ears faintly came yells of rage -- the roars of Tim and Knowlton who were cleaving a way to him. But he was crushed down on Schwandorf, smothered under a burden of bodies dead and alive. His stabs grew weak. Exhaustion and lack of air were killing him.

Pedro, Lourenco, Jose and the silent Rand came slashing and clubbing, cutting straight ahead with deadly surety. From still another direction Yuara and his companion came boring in with spears snatched from dead hands. The rescuers reached the heap at almost the same moment. But Yuara was the one whose arrival counted most.

In one last convulsive struggle McKay gained his knees. His head came out of the welter, and he gulped for breath. The lone clubman grunted, swung his weapon high, and with all his power drove it down at the unprotected face. With a mighty plunge Yuara threw himself over the captain. His spear sank into the stomach of the clubman. But the heavy war hammer fell with crushing force. The Red Bone collapsed, but his slayer also dropped under that terrible stroke with head mangled beyond recognition.

Yuara, son of Rana, warrior of Suba, who owed his life to McKay's rough surgery, had paid his debt.

Under the impact of his body McKay slumped, senseless. Over them now burst the bloodiest berserk battle of that bloody day. Before the united ferocity the men of Umanuh dropped as if rolled under by an inexorable machine of war. Backward they reeled, striving to escape the wall of cold steel surging at them -- only to fall under a fresh attack of ravening Mayorunas. The last of the group lurched headless to the ground under a decapitating side-swing from the awful club of Monitaya himself.

Then Knowlton, his lifeblood still draining slowly from his wounded shoulder, pitched on his face and was still.

"Back!" gasped Tim. "Raposa! Lend a hand here!"

The Raposa, green eyes ablaze and calmness totally gone, glared around as if seeking one more Red Bone to kill. Then, as Tim heaved the lieutenant across his shoulders, he ran back to the heap where McKay lay and dug him clear.

Pedro and Jose shoved other bodies aside to uncover the prone figure of Schwandorf -- a ghastly form dyed with the blood of the cannibals whom he had led there. He appeared to be dead, yet Brazilian and Peruvian looked keenly at him, then each other.

"There is a saying that the devil takes care of his own," grinned Jose. "It would be sad if this man should yet live. See! What is that tall Red Bone doing over yonder?"

Pedro followed his pointing finger. He saw no Red Bone. But when he looked back at Schwandorf he noticed something that made him glance quickly at Jose.

"Ah yes, Senor Schwandorf is truly dead," Jose added, wiping his machete carelessly on one bare leg. "There is no doubt that he is now with the devil. So, since we can do nothing for him,

et us look after the two North American senores."

Pedro, with a grim smile, turned with him toward the tribal ouses. The Mayorunas now were dispatching the last of the at- ackers, and a long, triumphant yell burst from them. Of the Red Bones who had swept into the clearing, not one remained alive.

At the shout of victory, the women flocked again into the enter of the maloca and the children dived out through the tun- els to behold the battlefield. Now the older women, experienced n treating wounds, busied themselves with the Americans, while he younger ones fetched water and pieces of isca -- a natural typtic made by ants -- or made up pads of healing herbs.

Tim, who had expected to play surgeon, found himself not nly relieved of his job, but being bathed and plastered with the thers. He, Jose, Pedro, and even Rand were gashed, bleeding, nd bruised by fierce blows -- minor injuries all, but such as ight easily result in blood poisoning.

McKay and Knowlton were under the capable treatment of the hief's wives. From waist up McKay was clawed, bitten, and ruised so badly that he was a fearsome spectacle; his left arm as dislocated, three fingers of his right hand were broken, his uscles badly wrenched; but his present unconsciousness was argely due to exhaustion and partial asphyxiation, Knowlton, hose skin was comparatively unmarked, but whose veins had ontinued to pour vital fluid during the fight, was badly weakened.

Other women busied themselves with their own male rela- ves, who came stumbling or were carried in by others. The Red ones, though annihilated, had made their mark on the Mayoruna ribe. Thirty-six of Monitaya's warriors lay dead. Yet all who urvived thought only of the victory and gloated of their scars of ombat. Those who had fallen had died as Mayorunas should, and o needed no sympathy or regret. Their bodies were being trans- orted into the forest, where, in accordance with tribal custom, ey would be burned. After this, the Red Bones would be cast to e waiting vultures.

Tim watched the work for a time and then turned to Rand.

"Raposa, you sure did some fancy work for a crazy man!"

The Raposa's green eyes glimmered; in fact they almost inkled. And for the second time the wild man spoke.

"I am not crazy."

Tim blinked, momentarily at a loss for words. "Well, don't t it worry you any. We're all crazy or we wouldn't be here."

The veteran eyed the other sharply, wondering if something d unscrambled his brains again.

The big tribal house now was full of life. Warriors, their

their hurts dressed, gathered around the hammocks of the more seriously injured. Others came in bearing severed Red Bone hands and feet. The women turned to their cooking vessels, stripping the flesh of their enemies from the bones and setting it to boil. The subchiefs moved about, eyes still shining, examining the wounded men and glancing at the preparations for the feast.

Over all drifted a steadily thickening smoke which rolled up and out through the vent in the peak of the roof, where the setting sun smote it with rays of gleaming red. Around the maloca gleamed the red light of the cooking fires, bubbling under red pots and pans. Red men and women in a crimson setting -- the scene formed a fitting end to the reddest day in the unwritten records of the tribe.

Monitaya himself, head high and chest swelling with pride, now came striding lithely, followed by a young warrior carrying something. He stopped between the hammocks of McKay and Knowlton and studied their faces gravely. At almost the same moment the eyes of the pair slowly opened and stared up at him.

The face of the great chief melted in one of its transforming smiles. The Americans grinned back. The big savage turned to his own hammock and sat down. Two of his women built up the royal fire and fell to work on the things handed over by the young warrior. Tim and his mates took one look, and then moved between the fire and the two officers, blocking the view.

"About time you woke up," chaffed Tim. "Fight's over and we've been hanging around waiting for you. Lay still now and don't move. You've had half the tribe waiting on you."

"Schwandorf dead?" hoarsely queried McKay.

"Him? Oh, sure. You fixed him right. The blackbirds have flown away with him by now. Say, you know that fellow Yuara? Know what he did?"

And while he talked, behind his back the wives of Monitaya completed their task and dropped into the great chief's stewpot the flesh of the blackbeard who would menace them no more.

## XXVI. - PARTNERS

Seven men squatted around a camp fire on the river bank. Beyond them, half revealed by the flickering light of the flames, rose the poles of a tambo wherein empty hammocks hung waiting. At the edge of the water lay two canoes.

Five wore the habiliments of civilization, though their shirts and breeches were badly tattered and stained. The other two were nude as savages, dark bearded and heavily tanned. Lifting

cigarettes, Knowlton and his tall, eagle-faced companion moved their arms stiffly, as if still hampered by injuries. Newly healed scars showed on the skins of the rest.

"Indians are a funny lot," declared Tim Ryan. "There's Monitaya, now. Keeps us a couple of weeks, doctors us half to death, feeds us till we gag, gives us new canoes, sends a band of warriors with us to see that we get to the river safe -- and doesn't even say goodby. No handshake, no 'Good luck,' -- just a grin like we were going around the house and come right back. And those fellows that came out with us did the same -- turned around and quit us without a word. If we lived among them for long, maybe we'd be dummies, too."

For a moment there was silence. For no apparent reason all glanced at one of the naked men, on whose skin faintly showed reddish streaks.

"You would," he said.

"Rand's talking again! First time since the fight."

"It's time I talked. I am not dumb. I am not crazy."

The green-eyed man spoke slowly, as if forming each word in his mind before pronouncing it.

"I have not talked before because I had to find myself. I had to hear English spoken and become used to it. I had to put things together in my mind. Even now some things are not clear. But I can talk and make sense of my talk. I will tell what I can remember. First tell me one thing. McKay, am I a murderer?"

"A murderer? You. If you are we never heard of it."

"A man named Schmidt. A merchant at Manaos."

"Gustav Schmidt? Piggy little man, bald and fat, with a scar across his chin?"

"Yes."

"He's dead, but you didn't kill him. We heard about it while we were in Manaos and saw his picture. What about him?"

"I thought I killed him. I struck him with a bottle. I was told he was dead. How long have I been here?"

"You left the States in 1915. It is now 1920."

"Five years? My God! What has happened in that time? Is my mother well?"

Knowlton spoke slowly. "Your mother died two years ago. Your uncle, Philip Dawson, also is dead."

Rand's jaw set, and he was silent for a time. The others busied themselves with making new cigarettes.

Finally Rand spoke. "My head -- tell me, what happened on the night before you dressed my lame foot? I remember clearly everything from the time I woke in the canoe before daylight that

morning. Before that there is a blur."

Knowlton sketched the events and told also of the glimpse which he and Pedro had caught while waiting outside the house of the Red Bone chief. A flash lit up Rand's face.

"So that's how I got my sore head. You struck me with your rifle butt. That explains much. Before I became a wild beast I was shot in the head. The bullet did not go through the skull. It struck me on the crown, and when I recovered consciousness I was not myself. I have not been the same until the second blow."

"Things like that can happen," mused Knowlton. "I've heard of them before."

"That is it," affirmed the Raposa. "I was not insane. But much was gone from me. My mind was a house full of closed doors which could not be opened. I knew who I was and why I was here, but I knew also that something had happened to my brain; knew I was defective; believed I was wanted for murder. So I could not go out. I could only stay here and live the jungle life.

"Now that the closed doors have opened, others have swung shut. I can't remember much of my wild-beast life here. Some things are clear. Too clear. Torturings and horrible feasts. Perhaps I should be grateful that some things are forgotten.

"But now my life up to the time I was shot is clear. I talked with a man who had traveled the Amazon and the Andes. I had never seen either one, and I was ready for something new. A steamer was just sailing south, and I got aboard in a hurry. No baggage but a suitcase and five thousand dollars. I had traveled a good bit -- Europe, Canada, Japan -- and knew that plenty of money was all that was needed. Thought it was the same way here. I've learned better.

"I visited Rio -- a few hours -- and then came up along the coast and inland. At Manaos I got into trouble. Went ashore and got to drinking with two Germans. One of them -- Schmidt -- got ugly and said some things about the States. Tell me something -- is the war over and did we get into it?"

"It is, and we did." And Knowlton outlined the epochal occurrences of the world conflict.

"And I missed that, too!" mourned Rand. "But I saw a war down here, anyway. When I quit seeing red I had a bottle neck in my hand and both Germans were down. Somebody said Schmidt was dead. A couple of men tried to grab me. I fought clear, hid awhile, got back on the boat without being noticed, and paid one of the crew to hide me in the hold and feed me. Nearly died from heat and suffocation down there, but lived to reach Iquitos, where the man smuggled me ashore. I thought I was safe there. But

before I could make a move I fell into the hands of Schwandorf."

"Schwandorf!"

"Schwandorf. He was in Iquitos. The sailor who hid me must have sold me out to him. Schwandorf told me he was a police officer sent to take me back to stand trial for murdering Schmidt. He took all my money to keep his mouth shut and take me to a safe place. The safe place was up this river. Then he began trying to bully me into doing dirty work for him -- running women. I saw red again and jumped for him. He gave me that bullet on the head. After that things are badly blurred.

"I found myself among savages. How I got there, why I wasn't killed, I don't know. Schwandorf was there awhile. Then he went away leaving me sure of only one thing -- I was a murderer. And -- well, that's about all, except that the savages seemed rather afraid of me and didn't want me around."

There was another silence. Then Lourenco remarked:

"Between Schmidt and Schwandorf you have suffered much. But neither can ever trouble you again. I do not see why Schwandorf took the trouble even to put you among the Red Bones."

"Any ideas on that subject, Jose?" asked McKay.

"Only a guess, Capitan, since I was not here five years ago. Schwandorf has always schemed for his own good. So perhaps, finding this man not dead, but darkened in mind, he thought he might be able to use him in some way at some future time. A dead man is useful to no one. If this man should never become valuable he could live and die forgotten among savages. If worth something he could be found again."

"Rand, since you're mentally sound," spoke McKay, "we may as well tell you how you happen to be among us. We three -- Merry, Tim, and I -- came here to find you. The settlement of the Dawson estate hinges on you."

"On me? How? I've no claim to it. Paul Dawson -- "

"Is dead, too. Killed in the Argonne. You're next in line."

The half-expected jubilance did not come.

"So Paul's gone," was Rand's reply. "Hard luck. Suppose I hadn't been found -- then what?"

"In due time the money would go to a school. Boy's school."

"Orphans? Blind? Cripples?"

"Hardly." McKay named an exclusive preparatory school. Rand's mouth twisted.

"Might have known it. Uncle Phil was fond of that sort of education that doesn't educate. I'm glad you fellows found me. I'll go home and collect every cent just to keep it out of the hands of that weak-kneed bunch!"

Knowlton chuckled. "You don't seem much enthused over having a couple of million dropped into your lap."

Rand sat still. His face remained cheerless, impassive. "What is money?" he said presently. "I've always had plenty of it, and what has it done for me? It makes you cynical, suspicious. What's worse, you depend too much on it."

"Maybe you'll change your tune when you get home," wondered Tim.

"Will I?" The green eyes impaled him. "Maybe, but I don't think so. I've had my run at blowing in money on myself alone. Perhaps I can do some good with those millions. There must be quite a few back home that were banged up in that war. And -- " His eyes turned to the three bushmen.

"Do not look at us in that way," said Lourenco, reading his thought. "We can make all the money we need, and we came only because we wanted excitement. Use your money for the crippled men who need it."

"And Jose Martinez also is well able to provide for his wants," coolly added the other naked man. "I am here only to settle old scores, and now they are settled. Each man is goaded by his own spur -- money, wine, women, excitement, revenge. Money is not mine."

"Well, since we three didn't come here because of wine, women, or revenge," Knowlton said whimsically, "it must have been for money and excitement. Don't know which was the stronger lure, but if we could have only one of the two I think we'd let the money slide. How about it, Rod?"

"Right! And Rand, let me say this: Before we knew you we had the impression that you weren't much. We've changed that idea. If you ever go broke and want to try some new place to make a strike, and you need partners, let us know."

The naked millionaire took it. For the first time a faint smile lightened his face.

"I'll do that, partners!" he promised.

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